

ENGAGING THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE OF HOPE AMONG TELUGU
MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

By

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ABSTRACT

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The UAE is the third largest producer of oil and gas in the world. Besides the unprecedented boom in the oil sector, the UAE also witnessed unparalleled growth in retail trade, construction and tourism. This economic boom depends to a great extent on a sizeable migrant workforce without whom the enormous progress would not have been possible. However, it is reported that the UAE has repeatedly failed to protect the basic human rights of its migrant workers.

This project aims to assess the way Telugu migrant workers engage with the Scripture message of hope in a hostile, abusive diaspora context. A second goal is to evaluate the view of church leaders on the use and impact of Bible Engagement tools provided by the Bible Society in the Gulf - printed, audio and storytelling - on their congregations in facing their daily challenges.

The study shows that all three BE tools are used extensively and almost equally by the interviewees and the churches. What is particularly striking is the way the migrants are rediscovering themselves as new creatures in Jesus Christ through hope. The data also shows how the migrants have experienced (and still do) a deeper understanding of a theology of the cross, which allows them to treat personal and corporate suffering as a Good Friday experience that is a prelude to the Easter Sunday experience. This self-discovery of the migrants is action based. That is, the interviewees are not keeping the message of hope to themselves but are sharing it with other fellow migrants.

What unfolds is that the migrants are engaged in “new evangelization”, a finding that urges the BSG to strengthen its partnership with the churches, offer BE tools in as many languages as possible, and adopt discipleship, training and literacy programs as some possible future directions.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING	1
CHAPTER TWO PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE	37
CHAPTER THREE PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION	74
CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	95
CHAPTER FIVE EVALUATION	104
CHAPTER SIX MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES	159
APPENDICES	170
APPENDIX A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL	171
APPENDIX B CHRISTIAN CHURCHGOERS IN THE UAE	223
APPENDIX C BSG RESOURCE CENTERS	224
APPENDIX D MIGRANT POPULATION AND COMPOSITION	225
APPENDIX E LIST OF LANGUAGES OF PRINTED AND AV RESOURCES	226
APPENDIX F CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TELUGU INTERVIEWEES IN THE STUDY	229
APPENDIX G CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCHES WHOSE PASTORS WERE INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY	232
APPENDIX H A SAMPLE OF SURPLUS MEANINGS GLEANED FROM THE COLLECTED DATA	233
BIBLIOGRAPHY	236

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

This chapter opens with a brief history of the Gulf and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), followed by the political, demographic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic context of the UAE. It will then focus on the historical presence of the Christian Church, starting from the earliest centuries, through colonial times, to the present day. The chapter will describe the ministry of Christian Scripture and Literature in its initiation and development from the earliest years to the present time. It concludes with an overview of the migrant situation, globally and locally, and an outline of the socio-economic and cultural challenges migrants face during their employment in the diaspora context.¹

The Gulf: Persian or Arabian?

The Arabian/Persian Gulf, located in western Asia between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, is an extension of the Indian Ocean.² It stretches across the southwest of Asia from 23 to 30 degrees northern latitude and 48 to 56 degrees eastern longitude. On the south side of Iran it covers 1259 kilometers.³ Large rivers, like Karoun, Zohreh, Jarrahi Mond, Dalki, Hendijan, Kol and Minab flow into the region from the Iranian side. Most of the people of the Arabian/Persian Gulf are Arabs whose roots and ancestors go back generations. Arabic is the official language

¹ Appendix A includes a copy of the approved Project Proposal.

² United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names, Working Paper no 61, 23rd session, Vienna, 28 March - 4 April 2006, 1 (accessed October 9, 2010).

³ Ibid.

though dialects distinguish one region from another. With the expansion of Islam in the 7th century AD, all of the countries in the area accepted the new religion.

The nomenclature of the Gulf is controversial. Historically and internationally it is sometimes known as the Persian Gulf, but also as the Arabian Gulf. Today, most Arab states simply call it the Gulf.⁴ Iran, the largest country adjacent to these waters and with a population of over 70 million has designated the Gulf as the Persian Gulf throughout its history. Modern scholarship and historical records going back at least 2500 years to the time of the powerful Pars Empire agree on the name Persian Gulf.⁵ But the nationalism of most of the Arab countries, including the ones bordering the Persian Gulf, challenged the Iranian position and insisted on calling the Gulf the Arabian Gulf.⁶ The coup of Adbulkarim Ghasem in 1958 in Iraq, followed by another by Baas, led to claims for Iranian territory and a political decision by Iran to avoid using the name Persian Gulf for political reasons.⁷ Anti-Iranian feelings in the region reached new heights in 1960 after Iran and Egypt ceased all diplomatic relations; a similar anti-Iranian mood followed the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 because of Iran's previous support of Israel.⁸ The Islamic revolution in 1979, together with the growing political and economic ties between the West and the Arab states gradually increased

⁴ Because of the ongoing political, socio-economic and religious tensions in the region and the resulting competition for naming and influencing the area this thesis will use the more neutral term Gulf.

⁵ Ibid., 1-2.

⁶ Niussha Boghrati, "Omission of Persian Gulf name angers Iran," www.worldpress.com. December 28, 2006, 2.

⁷ United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

Iran's isolation from the western world, led to a general acceptance of Gulf as the Arabian rather than the Persian Gulf.⁹

The Gulf includes the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. These six countries formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in 1981. The aim of the GCC is to foster peace and security in the region and to develop economic relations among the member countries. The GCC is increasingly becoming an important entity in the Arab and international world, assuming the role of an active political power broker in the region.¹⁰

The member countries of GCC hold a total area of around 2.5 million square kilometers and a total population of 40,317,404 million. Headquartered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the GCC launched a free trade zone in 1983. A year later, in 1984, the GCC member states signed a mutual defense pact and formed the Peninsula Shield Force, a unified defense unit. In an early implementation of this defense strategy, the GCC sent forces to Bahrain in March 2011 because violent riots in the Kingdom jeopardized security in the region. The bilateral agreement between the US and the GCC in the area of security is also an important and vital mechanism for the stability of the region.¹¹

In 2003 the GCC established a Customs Union and in 2008 a Common Market to better manage the petroleum industry of the GCC countries, which together contain two thirds of the oil resources and production in the Middle East and North Africa, 55% of the world's oil reserves and one fifth of its production globally. Of these

⁹ Boghrati, "Omission of Persian Gulf Name Angers Iran."

¹⁰ Gulf Cooperation Council – German Federal Foreign Office (accessed August 31, 2012).

¹¹ Ibid.

countries, the economy in the GCC belongs to Saudi Arabia, while the richest country in terms of per-capita GDP is Qatar.¹²

In 2010, the GCC countries were ranked as the easiest place to do business in the Middle East.¹³ According to World Bank sources, Saudi Arabia comes in at 13th place in the world in terms of a business friendly climate, while Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman rank 20th, 33rd, 39th, 61st and 65th respectively.¹⁴ According to the latest statistics, the GCC countries belong to the top 139 countries with the most competitive economies: Qatar 17th, Saudi Arabia 21st, UAE 25th, Oman 34th, Kuwait 35th and Bahrain 37th.¹⁵ Among the factors driving the economic boom in the GCC countries two are often cited: improved macro-economic standing resulting from rising oil prices and sound policies such as business reforms, investment in infrastructure, economic diversity, combating inflation and improvement in the educational system.¹⁶

The UAE: a brief history and the socio-economic, political, cultural and demographic set up

The UAE is a federation of sheikhdoms in the southern part of the Gulf. It includes six emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, Ras el Khaimah and Umm al-Qawain.¹⁷ Together they include a total area of approximately 84,000 kilometers square, bordering from the west Qatar, from the south-west Saudi Arabia,

¹² Gulf Cooperation Council – German Federal Foreign Office (accessed August 31, 2012).

¹³ Martin Hvidt, “Economic and Institutional Reforms in the Arab countries,” *Middle East Journal* 65, no.1 (winter 2011): 93.

¹⁴ World Bank, *Doing Business 2010: Reforming through Difficult Times, Comparing Regulation in 183 Economies* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2009).

¹⁵ Hvidt, “Economic and Institutional Reforms in the Arab countries,” 96.

¹⁶ Klaus Schwab and Michael E. Porter, “The Global Competitiveness Report, 2008-2009” (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2008), 30.

¹⁷ Christopher M. Davidson, “The United Arab Emirates: Prospects for Political Reform,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15, no.11 (spring/summer 2009): 1.

and from the north-west Oman.¹⁸ Abu Dhabi is the federal capital of the UAE.¹⁹ The majority of the UAE land is desert with oases scattered around and some low-peaked mountains on the north known as Hajaar.²⁰ The Gulf coastline measures around 1320 kilometers.²¹ Of the total population (8,264,000),²² 13% is national, 23% Arabs and Iranians, around 50% South Asians, and the rest East Asians, Europeans and Americans.²³ The migrant labor force constitutes 40% of the total population.²⁴

Archaeological evidence indicates a continuous habitation of 4000 years, primarily by nomadic Bedouins who for years lived in the present country boundaries. Islam invaded the region in the 7th century AD. The Portuguese arrived at Khor Fakkan in the Gulf around 1506. Krane describes the tragic events that unfolded there when Captain Alfonso de Albuquerque's ship dropped anchor at its shores:

When his fleet reached Khor Fakkan, crowds gathered on the beach, beating drums and shouting. Horsemen galloped up and down the beach and spectators climbed atop the town's walls and hill behind to see their first glimpse of the European visitors. Albuquerque and his men peered at the spectacle from their decks and decided that Khor Fakkan's reception wasn't submissive enough. The Portuguese waded ashore, unsheathed their swords, and began hacking off noses and ears, bayoneting men, capturing or killing women and children, and putting the torch to everyone of Khor Fakkan's handsome houses with their lemon and orange trees and horse stables.²⁵

The Ottoman rule of the UAE, which began in the 16th century, gave way in 1892 to the British protectorate. The British and the rulers of the UAE signed a treaty

¹⁸ Special Report, "UAE: Leading from the front," *The Middle East*, February 2009, 33-34.

¹⁹ www.mpiweb.org (accessed July 15, 2009).

²⁰ Emirates: *Nationality*, 2010, 207.

²¹ Ibid.

²² UAE National Bureau of Statistics (accessed January 1, 2012).

²³ Thenational.ae (accessed December 30, 2010).

²⁴ CIA World Factbook, 2012.

²⁵ Jim Krane, *City of Gold* (New York: Picador, 2010), 282.

whereby all the states were to be recognized as the Trucial States and were promised protection from the pirates who were very active along the Persian coastline.²⁶

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the status of the Trucial States under the British protectorate remained unchanged.²⁷ In 1971 with independence from the British, the Trucial States merged into 7 autonomous emirates under Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan's leadership (1918-2004) who believed unity to be the best hope for the new nation, especially at a time full of regional socio-political challenges.²⁸ Admirers of Sheikh Zayed call him a visionary leader. Tradition has it that Sheikh Zayed, accompanied by his friends from the desert hills of Al Ain (his home town), would look at the site of a projected desert city. There he would watch the sunset, recite his prayers, and say: "Here we shall build the school, here the hospital and there the university."²⁹ His friends seemed puzzled and incredulous as to how an infrastructure could be built on sand. Researchers agree that Sheikh Zayed believed in a political system that combined local autonomy with a federal government to coordinate state affairs and establish one foreign policy.³⁰ The UAE has since built its independence and sovereign wealth funds and attracted an enormous amount of international investments.³¹

Like the rest of the Gulf countries, the UAE has invested in diversification, technological development and a migrant labor market to fuel its economic

²⁶ Emirates: Nationality, 208.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Abdulla Al Suwaidi, "The United Arab Emirates at 40: A Balance Sheet," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (winter 2011): 44.

²⁹ Steve Dobransky, "The United Arab Emirates and the Black Pearl Model Of Economic Development," *International Journal on World Peace* 28, no. 2 (June 2011): 45.

³⁰ Al Suwaidi, "The United Arab Emirates at 40," 44.

³¹ Davidson, "The United Arab Emirates," 117.

development³² and to link these sectors in such a way as to legitimate the political system.³³ Several factors spurred economic development: a competitive business environment open to foreign investors; expanding production of oil and gas as the two essential exports needed for growth; enhancing national human capital through modernizing education and medical services; and by supporting global efforts to make the environment cleaner through creating renewable energy resources.³⁴

Dubai, one of the 7 emirates, has stepped forth as a world city and global commercial hub that knows no limits to infrastructure development. Dubai attracts many global professional elites, promotes luxury tourism, entertainment facilities and winter sun resorts. Dubai caters to international tastes and services and ranks as a world cultural center.³⁵ Major Internet, media and shipping firms as well as regional and corporate headquarters now call Dubai home thanks to efforts that expanded infrastructure to accommodate international firms and create a friendly environment for business growth.³⁶ Most visibly Dubai's architectural mega projects (the Burj al-Arab Hotel, the Palm Island of Jumeirah, the Burj Dubai Tower, and The World private islands) document Dubai's unique place in the global economy.³⁷ It is

³² John Muysken and Samia Nour, "Deficiencies in Education and Poor Prospects for Economic Growth in the Gulf Countries: The Case of the UAE," *Journal of Development Studies* 42, no. 6 (August 2006): 957.

³³ Al Suwaid, "The United Arab Emirates at 40," 45.

³⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁵ Christopher M. Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 136-137.

³⁶ Clifford Krauss, "Halliburton is moving its CEO from Houston to Dubai," *New York Times*, March 11, 2007.

³⁷ Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Redrawing Boundaries: Dubai, an Emerging Global City," in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, edited by Yasser Elsheshtawy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 187.

estimated that 160 countries are represented in the city.³⁸ According to the latest statistics, the UAE's GDP was USD 194.3, 208.7, 200.4, 243.9, and 256.5 billion in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively. The figures show how the UAE economy grew steadily despite the 4% drop in the GDP in 2009 due to a Dubai debt crisis. The UAE is the 17th richest country in the world.³⁹

Before its independence and the discovery of oil in the second half of the 20th century, the UAE was a poor, underdeveloped country that had a nomadic, tribal pattern of life and culture that had not changed for centuries.⁴⁰ True enough the 200 years of British shielded the UAE from pirates and other outside dangers, but it contributed very little towards the development of the infrastructure. The discovery of oil changed national life rapidly: buildings sprung up, towns emerged from desert sands, a new wave of foreigners arrived, investments increased, schools and hospitals opened, and hotels and airport facilities expanded.⁴¹

Equally as important to nation-building in the UAE is the pragmatic working relationship between Islam and the national government. In fact, young Emiratis do not like to talk about the past because they realize that the UAE had never really been a prosperous place.⁴² For them, the past begins with the founding of the UAE in 1971. This is the culture of achievement and success. Hobsbawm and Ranger draw our attention to this very fact:

³⁸ Jessica Caplin, "Mirage in the Desert Oasis: Forced Labor in Dubai and the United Arab Emirates," *Harvard International Review* (winter 2009): 29.

³⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: United Arab Emirates- Economy," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ae.html> (accessed January 17, 2013).

⁴⁰ Emirates: *Nationality*, 2010, 209.

⁴¹ Jane Bristol-Rhys, "Emirati Historical Narratives," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (June 2009): 108.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 115.

It is not difficult to appreciate this story of non-past because these young Emiratis have grown up in a constructed environment that has little connection to any past that existed here. Heritage clubs, museums and tourist villages have preserved the material culture of the pre-oil society and re-invented traditions in an attempt to turn heritage and tradition into an appreciation of history, but young Emiratis do not incorporate history into the narratives they tell about their country.⁴³

Indeed, the stories of the past and non-past are still part of today's discourse in the country. As most teachers in schools and faculty members in universities are non-Emiratis, they often consider the old Bedouin story rather old, insignificant and not worthy to pass on to the new generation.⁴⁴

It is in this context that one should acknowledge as to how the tribal population of the so called Trucial States in the UAE were organized and integrated in building a successful yet a unique consolidation of national identity.⁴⁵ The government has been keen on this development in order to co-opt religion into their set up rather than the other way around. This has led to censorship issues whereby approval of suitable topics for preaching in the mosques usually comes from the Federal Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. The latter implies that the political system in the UAE exercises a high degree of central control.⁴⁶ This same control has helped Islam to be seen as a pragmatic and not absolute religion. It also helped the UAE to become a modern state away from Islamic radicalism.⁴⁷ Relegation of

⁴³ E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). In Jane Bristol-Rhys, "Emirati Historical Narratives," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (June 2009): 116.

⁴⁴ Jane Bristol-Rhys, "Emirati Historical Narratives," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (June 2009): 118.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Christie, "Globalization, Religion and State Formation in the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11, no. 2 (June 2010): 204.

⁴⁶ Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival*, in Christie, *Totalitarian Movements*, 209.

⁴⁷ Christie, "Globalization, Religion and State Formation," 210.

religion, Christie argues, meant that political leadership comes before religious leaders, and that the latter are controlled by the state.

The UAE, like other Gulf countries, is moving towards a democracy in its behavior and actions, if not in depth at least as a face or front view.⁴⁸ This reality is an important factor, especially when we discuss Christian presence in the UAE in the next section.

Christian presence in the Gulf: a historical overview

From the 4th century onwards Christianity flourished in the Gulf, and even when it did not flourish but only survived it remained a spiritual and cultural force in the Gulf, right up to the present day. The Syriac sources of the Church of East, also known as the Nestorian Church, document the presence of monasteries from the mid-4th century onwards. These monasteries were located in north-eastern Arabia which included the Bahrain archipelago and the Qatar peninsula, two parts of a region known as Bet Qatraye.⁴⁹ Three of the over 300 bishops who attended the Nicene Council (325 AD) belonged to the Diocese of Bet Qatraye, one of the most ancient dioceses in the Eastern Arabian Church. Today this region is known as Oman, Qatar and the UAE.⁵⁰

The Church of the East founded Episcopal seats from the early 5th century onwards.⁵¹ Records indicate that the Diocese of Bet Qatraye established an ecclesiastical province that lasted only for a short period in the mid to late 7th century.

⁴⁸ Fatima Al Sayegh, "Post 9/11 Changes in the Gulf: The case of the UAE," *Middle East Policy* 111, no. 2 (2004): 107.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁵¹ D. T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity: From Alexander to the Coming of Islam*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 241.

Metropolitan Ardashir together with the Bishop of Bet Mazunaye (presently Oman) led the province.

After the invasion of Islam in 629 AD, the Christian community remained active in Bet Qatraye even though people in other places, such as the Bet Mazunaye province, converted to Islam. In spite of the fact that the bishops of Bet Qatraye did not attend synods after AD 676 documentary and archaeological evidence shows that the churches remained active till the late 9th century.⁵²

One hypothesis about how Christianity reached the Gulf points to the arrival of Christianized Arab tribes who were in close contact with Christian communities in al-Hira (central Iraq), communities that also included a population of Tamim and Abd al-Qays (inhabitants of Bahrain in the northeast of Arabia).⁵³ Research also suggests that Christianity spread through the missionary activities of the Nestorian Church, a split from the western Syrian Jacobite or Monophysite Church in the 5th century.⁵⁴ Scholars point to the persecution of the Nestorians in Persia by Shapur II as a motive for Christians to migrate to the Gulf.⁵⁵ The 1992 discovery of a church and a monastery site dating back to the 6th or 7th centuries AD on the island of Sir Bani Yas, Abu Dhabi, documents the presence of the Christian community in the region.⁵⁶

⁵² R. A. Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf during the first centuries of Islam," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 71.

⁵³ Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 242.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf," 100.

⁵⁶ G. R. D. King, "A Nestorian Monastic Settlement on the Island of Sir Bani Yas," *Abu Dhabi, a Preliminary Report BSOAS* 60 (1997): 221.

Archaeologists have found evidence of Christian pearl fishers around Bahrain and dated it to AD 835.⁵⁷ Literary evidence from the last decade of the 9th century, namely, the patriarchal chronicle of Mari, reports that Christians lived in the region of Yamama and Bahrain and enjoyed the favor of a local rebel leader.⁵⁸ Other literary evidence indicates that Christianity flourished in the Gulf in the late 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries during which periods Christians and Muslims lived together in peace. According to a letter that Isho'yahb III sent to separatist Metropolitan Simeon of Ardashir in AD 647, the threat to the church came from within the community rather than from Muslim conquerors. The insert from the letter shows his good relations with the Muslims:

These Arabs, to whom God for the time being has given the Empire of the world, are also, as you know, very close to us; and not just because they do not attack the Christian religion, but they praise our faith, honor the priests and the saints of the Lord and award benefits to the churches and monasteries.⁵⁹

The church expanded in the late 7th or early 8th centuries as shown by the foundation of the al-Qusue Church and the general toleration of the Muslim community.⁶⁰ The monastery at Kharg documents the more active ministry of Timothy I and describes the 8th and 9th centuries as the Golden Age of the Church of the East, a fact that is highly reflected in the archaeological records of the Gulf.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Robin C. Beaucamp, "L'éveche Nestorian de Masmahig dans l'archipel d'al-Bahrayn," *BB* 2 (1983): 186-18, in R. A. Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf during the first centuries of Islam," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 106.

⁵⁸ J. M. Fiey, *Communautes syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines a 1552* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 211, 216.

⁵⁹ Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 260, 389.

⁶⁰ Beaucamp, "L'éveche nestorien de Masmahig," 106.

⁶¹ C. Baumer, *The Church of the East. An illustrated history of Assyrian Christianity* (London: Tauris, 2006), 156.

From the 9th century onwards Christianity is less evident in the life of the Gulf. Still, there were many Christians who chose to pay the *jizya*, the poll tax on non-Muslims, rather than give up their faith. According to Isho'yahb III's letter to Simeon of Ardashir other Christians in the region of Mazun converted to Islam in order not to lose their possessions and wealth.⁶²

There are two schools of thought on the matter of Christianity's fate after the 9th century.⁶³ One argues that the persecution and slaughter of the Church of the East completely removed it from the Gulf. Proponents base this case on Prophet Mohammed's deathbed words: "Throughout the peninsula there shall be no second creed."⁶⁴ However, there is little to substantiate this case. In this period Christians together with the Jews acquired the *dhimmi* status (a lower status than Muslims in Islamic law), and they had to pay *jizya*. But historical records indicate, "Slaughter on any scale by the Muslims at this time was unusual."⁶⁵

The second school of thought links the disappearance of the Church of the East to the Greek (Byzantine) theology and philosophy that alienated Arab intellectuals and religious leaders and confirmed conviction that Islam had to "protest that the real message of Christianity had been submerged by the subtitles of Byzantine dogma."⁶⁶ The mass conversion of Christians to Islam seems to fit better into the scenario envisioned by this school: for Christians weary of dogmatic controversies, Islam simply made more sense to them. The economic argument for conversion

⁶² Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 346.

⁶³ Andrew Thompson. *Christianity in the UAE: Culture and Heritage* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2011), 60.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

should however not be overlooked: Christians were restricted in their movements and conversion meant better business and social networks.⁶⁷

Christian presence re-entered the Gulf with the first colonial ventures of the Portuguese, especially in Asia and Africa. This colonial era began with Vasco Da Gama who sailed from Portugal on July 8, 1497 in search for trade routes that passed through Muslim and Ottoman controlled countries. The Portuguese, “motivated by a strong anti-Muslim animus, their heritage from a day when Muslims dominated the Iberian Peninsula,” invaded Arabia and built forts in Oman and Bahrain and established a base in Hormuz on the Persian side of the straits of the Gulf.⁶⁸ The Portuguese offered protection to Catholic Carmelite mission activities. Later, Dutch Protestants from the Dutch East India Company, chartered in 1602, succeeded the Dutch Protestants. A thinly disguised Catholic-Protestant religious rivalry stoked the tough competition among western powers in the East.

The British occupation of the Red Sea, Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Iran began in 1600 with the establishment of the East India Company. In order to protect their lines of communication, the British destroyed the Portuguese base in Hormuz on the Persian coast in 1622 and from then on began competing with the French Company of the East Indies. The French competition with the British and the Dutch sparked a more active Catholic missionary enterprise in the region and the world.⁶⁹

The American Arabian Mission, a Protestant organization that operated in the Gulf and southern Iraq, was established in 1889. In 1894 the Reformed Church in America took over the Mission but formally dissolved it in 1973. The Mission's

⁶⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

⁶⁸ Lewis Scudder, III. *The Arabian Mission's Story: In search of Abraham's Other Son*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 9-10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

program included medical and hospital services in Bahrain as early as 1905 and schools for boys.⁷⁰ The Mission built the first proper hospital building in Kuwait in 1913. The successor institutions for the schools and the hospitals continue to exist in Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman even after the Mission ceased its activities in 1973.⁷¹

In his analysis of the Mission ministry in the Gulf, Al Tamimi indicates that the preaching of the gospel, in any visible or conventional sense, bore no fruit since no indigenous Christian community emerged. Still, a foundation for the future was laid since thousands of travelers, businessmen, and migrants from the Middle East and other places arrived in the Gulf and some of them established churches. But the fact remains that conversions among the locals are not documented. While there is no one good explanation for this particular failure,⁷² Scudder proposes that the Mission's success lay on another plane, namely the missionaries' remarkable success in winning the acceptance of the local populations.⁷³ The missionaries managed to build their service institutions based on this "acceptance." In this respect, the mission work they did showed their Christian philanthropy and devotion. The latter characteristics had a great impact on society, which remains tangible "years after their metamorphosis or demise."⁷⁴

The Church in the UAE: past and present

The Gulf first encountered western European Christianity when the Portuguese arrived in 1506. The Arab memory of "the indiscriminate killing of

⁷⁰ In Oman schools opened in 1901; in Kuwait in 1913; and in Bahrain in 1924.

⁷¹ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 195.

⁷² Abd-ul-Malik Khalaf Al Tamimi, at-tabshir fi mintaqat-il-khalij il-arabi: dirasah fi ittariikh il- ijtimai wa is-siyasi (*Evangelism in the Region of the Arabian Gulf: A study in Social and Political History*) (Kuwait: Sharikat-il-Kazimah li in-Nashr wa it-Tarjamah wa it-Tawzi, 1982), 237.

⁷³ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 417-418.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

women, children and the old, and the mutilations inflicted on their prisoners by the Portuguese” became engraved in the minds of the Arabs living anywhere between the Red Sea and the Persian coast and were remembered as “the deeds of the Christians.”⁷⁵ The violent spirit of the Portuguese colonial era led during the British colonial times to a period when “bridge builders” like Captain Thomas Perronet Thompson succeeded in signing a treaty with the Trucial States. Captain Thompson’s military regime inspired so much confidence among the Arabs that they decided not to attack the British forces. The Captain was regarded as:

A person invariably courteous to the sheikhs and he even attempted to convert them to Christianity and obtained a small supply of Bibles in Arabic for them. In this he made no headway and several sheikhs wrote to him expressing their contempt for his religion. Thompson’s affection for the local rulers led the Arabs of the coast to be tolerant towards Christians. So strong were the ties of friendships he even obtained permission to use a mosque for church parades.⁷⁶

Captain Thompson, a man of deep Christian convictions, spoke against the slave trade. Because he spoke Arabic well he communicated directly with local Arab leaders, the only British leader to do so.⁷⁷

Two other efforts contributed to the toleration of the Christian community in the UAE. The first one was the work of the American Arabian Mission from 1889 onwards whose medical and educational services to the local community, particularly the Oasis hospital in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, and the dedicated ministry of the American doctors and nurses to the extended Arab community in the country, won many friends among the Arabs. The second one lay in the political leadership of Sheikh Zayed Al

⁷⁵ Frauke Heard-Bey, ed., *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2004), 282.

⁷⁶ Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: George and Unwin, 1970), 126.

⁷⁷ Andrew Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE: Culture and Heritage* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2011), 27.

Nahyan, the founding president of the UAE. Referring to the Christian presence in the UAE, Sheikh Zayed said, “Together let us build a strong and invincible fortress to support our brothers and the work forever towards peace with our friends. We hold out our hands to everyone in a spirit of cooperation for the well-being of our nation and our people.”⁷⁸ While the Sheikh’s declaration does not grant religious freedom, it signifies toleration, respect, and collaboration.

While the missionaries received general praise for their contribution to the fields of medicine and education as well as for their introduction of many the amenities of modern life, they failed to convert people from Islam to Christianity. Thompson explains: “Arabs believed that by becoming Christians they would not only be cut off from the rest of society but also change their allegiance.”⁷⁹

The Evangelical Church in the UAE evolved out of the American Arabian Mission, specifically out of the Mission's hospital services that contributed so much to the health of the local community.⁸⁰ Known as the United Christian Church of Dubai, the Evangelical Church opened its doors in 1962. It expanded into Abu Dhabi in 1966. The Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi established St. Andrew’s Vicarage in early 1965 and the Chaplaincy of Dubai and Sharjah, known as Holy Trinity in 1970. The Order of Capuchins carries responsibility for the Roman Catholic Church in the UAE and the rest of the Gulf. The Order consecrated St. Joseph Church in Abu Dhabi in 1965.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The Sarah Hosman in Sharjah, the Oasis Hospital in Al Ain and the Maternity Hospital in Fujairah stand out as noteworthy examples.

The Rosary Sisters opened the first private school in Abu Dhabi in 1969, running it from within the St. Joseph compound. The foundation of the St. Mary's Catholic Church building in Dubai was laid in 1966, with inauguration in 1967. The Comboni Sisters have run St. Mary's High School since 2002. Two Catholic churches, one built in Jabal Ali, Dubai, in 2001 and another in Fujairah in 2002 complete the picture. The Vatican established diplomatic relations with the UAE in 2007.

The largest group of Christians in the UAE is made up of Indians. The Syriac Orthodox Church, Mar Thoma Church, and Church of South India have large congregations that worship in Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Kanada and English. Migrant workers from India and the Republic of the Philippines worship in Catholic and Protestant congregations; Indian workers from Kerala have established a strong Malayalee-speaking church community. The Indian Pentecostal Church and the New Testament Church also boast very active, large congregations. Members of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church, active in the UAE for decades, speak Arabic, which gives them immediate access to the local Muslims in terms of language and culture.⁸¹

Dubai alone counts over 100 Christian churches and denominations. Evangelical expansion in Asia, mission programs from the West, internal splits among denominations, and the diverse needs of the different ethnic groups have spurred this growth (Appendix B presents a detailed makeup of Christians in the UAE).⁸²

⁸¹ Andrew Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE: Culture and Heritage* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2011), 8.

⁸² Rolf Pearson, *The Church in the Gulf - Open Doors, Open Minds: Report of Middle East Council of Churches-1997-2003* (Oman: Gulf Liaison Office, 2004), 2.

Studies estimate that 9% of the total population in the UAE is Christian.⁸³ The main church is an expatriate phenomenon with Asians constituting a majority. The Catholic Church constitutes the biggest Christian community in the UAE. The popular belief is that there are almost one million Catholics and the remaining denominations count up to 250,000 to 300,000. The numbers are all approximate and taken from church sources. The exact census is difficult to obtain because the number of migrants changes constantly. Laborers usually stay for a few years and then return to their native countries when their work contracts expire or they find new work contracts elsewhere. This is also a major feature of the Churches and denominations in the Gulf. Christians have one foot in the home country and one in the host country.⁸⁴ Certainly, such a context poses serious challenges to the mandate of the Christian community in the Gulf in general and in the UAE in particular. The Church tries its best to cater to the spiritual needs of its congregations, something the authorities are comfortable with as long as it is done only within the walls of the church compound.

Another challenge is what Graham calls “forced ecumenism.”⁸⁵ Because Christian churches and denominations are not allowed to own any land in the Gulf, they usually rely on the government to give them a piece of land to build a church on. This ‘privilege’ is not granted to all churches and denominations, which means that different church traditions and congregations share the same space. At times, this “forced ecumenism” has and still produces some “wonderful examples of cooperation” as congregants learn to live together with a “shared voice” in an effort to

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Rolf Pearson, *The Church in the Gulf- Open Doors, Open Minds: Report of Middle East Council of Churches-1997-2003* (Oman: Gulf Liaison Office, 2004), 10.

⁸⁵ Catherine Graham, “The Gulf Church, Migrant Workers and Muslim Society,” extensive survey independently printed in 2009, 210.

foster better relations with “government officials” and to seek a fruitful ministry among migrant workers. At other time this arrangement led and still leads to “fierce internal tensions” and impedes “cooperation among churches” because of differences in priorities among those seeking to remedy financial, or legal, social or religious needs.⁸⁶

The churches seek to build good relations with the local communities in the Gulf. Rolf Pearson, former General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in the Gulf, for example, championed the Open Doors - Open Minds Foundation, an agency in Dubai that tries to reach out to Muslims, not to convert them but to build bridges between the local community and the migrants. He writes, “Christians have a responsibility to respond to the offer of Dialogue (Open Doors - Open Minds) and the churches cannot take the risk of not entering into communication with all God’s children.”⁸⁷ Pearson believes that the Gulf countries are places where dynamic people meet and where millions of migrants come to build themselves a future. He argues that these people are often courageous people with open minds prepared to open closed doors.

Thompson, an Anglican priest in Abu Dhabi, sees a change in mindsets: “With many church buildings coming up, people can see that the Christians are to stay in the country. The potted plant is being lifted out of the pot and being planted firmly in the soil.”⁸⁸ The churches’ key function in the UAE, according to Thompson, is to engage more purposefully with the migrant communities and the Emiratis. To achieve this,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Pearson, *The Church in the Gulf- Open Doors, Open Minds*, 9.

⁸⁸ Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE*, 155.

he asserts: “There is a need to educate and equip Christians living in the UAE to live their lives with an integrity and authenticity that is rooted in the Scriptures.”⁸⁹

Pearson’s and Thompson’s perspectives reinvigorate the ancient concept of the religious Other and in so doing create a condition for the possibility of understanding the religious Other and building common interests with the Other that are rooted in the Scriptures. Both perspectives deserve our attention but present great challenges to the Church and the Bible Society in an ever changing demographic, social and political context. These challenges surface especially in the Scripture ministry in the Gulf in general and the UAE in particular but also in the growth and composition of the migrant labor force.

Scripture ministry in the Gulf and the UAE

The American Arabian Mission, the pioneer advocate for Scripture ministry in the Gulf, aimed from its inception chiefly at evangelism. Its literature distribution Scripture ministry began in 1819 when the above-mentioned British Captain Thompson commanded the garrison in Ras el Khaimah.⁹⁰ Contemporary records remember Captain Thompson as being “invariably courteous to the sheikhs” and an officer who “even attempted to convert them to Christianity and obtained a small supply of Bibles in Arabic for them.”⁹¹ Samuel Zwemer arrived in the Trucial States in 1900 to continue the work of the American Arabian Mission. As a pioneer who developed the educational and medical missions in the region, including the UAE, he preached the Gospel for the first time to many Muslims, including the ruling sheikh, who “allegedly asked for a reading of the Gospel and even purchased a large Arabic

⁸⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁹⁰ Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE*, 30.

⁹¹ Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: George and Unwin, 1970), 126.

Bible.”⁹² Other pioneers included the Rev. James Moerdyk who came to the Trucial States in 1901. Facing fierce opposition to his preaching, he immediately realized that the Bible was a book that was forbidden by the local Muslims. His experience reflected that of many missionaries over the years: local people welcomed the medical ministry of the missionaries but not their religious message.⁹³

The American Arabic Mission’s publishing house, based in Beirut, Lebanon, supplied Christian literature while the British and Foreign Bible Society provided Bibles and gospel portions. Trained colporteurs made Bibles and portions available, paving the way the way for future Bible shops that distributed such literature. “Apart from distributing tracts and selling Bibles,” writes Scudder, “evangelistic work was primarily a matter of personal contact, visits in private homes, and conversations carried on in the environment of the Bible shop or the dispensary.”⁹⁴ A “discipline of conducting gatherings” was organized in the Mission’s hospitals for women, for example, where the Scriptures were read followed by hymn singing and short talks.⁹⁵

Mass media, particularly radio, caught the attention of the Mission in the late 1940s. The Near East Christian Council’s radio program “Radio Voice of the Gospel”, which broadcast from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, provided an effective tool for evangelization and contributed towards the establishment of Scripture tape production centers in Kuwait and Bahrain. The Bible shops came together into the Family Bookshop Group (FBG) in the late 1960s in a joint venture between the Danish Mission and Reformed Church of America. The FBG later opened branches in Oman

⁹² Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE*, 72.

⁹³ Fatma Al Sayegh, “American Missionaries in the UAE Region in the Twentieth Century.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32 (1996): 126.

⁹⁴ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission’s Story*, 195.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

and Qatar as well. The intention was that “a general bookshop which made good books for general reading available as well as Bibles and Christian literature would have much broader and more significant ministry.”⁹⁶

The Reformed Church of America and Danish Mission started to gradually withdraw from this venture, eventually handing it over to the MECC in 1972. Over the years and particularly after 1982, the FBG started to lose its original mission of “Bible shops” and started to operate as any other bookstore, completely deviating from evangelism and the distribution of Christian literature. The MECC lost its control over the management that seemed more interested in making money than anything else. The change was widely criticized by the Christian community, and the MECC tried in vain to bring the FBG back to its original mandate.⁹⁷ Indeed, it was a great loss to the Christian community; however, finances seemed to be the underlying reason for the abandonment of the original mandate. Even so, today, the FBG has ceased to function in Bahrain and has considerably downsized its operation in the other Gulf countries.

The present laws in the UAE do not allow proselytization of Muslims. Churches and denominations celebrate their worship services in their buildings, which are located inside walled compounds. No home or private gatherings are allowed. Websites that offend Islam and other faiths, including Christianity are blocked. Pornography sites and others that post political criticism of the ruling authorities and religious groups are also blocked. It is very hard and risky to contest any of these restrictions. Deportation, imprisonment with no trial, and confiscation of Bible

⁹⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁹⁷ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 219.

consignments are risks that no Christian worker or organization is willing to take.

Taken together, though, as Thompson argues

These restrictions can hardly be described as persecution because in this so-called tolerant milieu there are also many opportunities for others to learn about the Christian faith in the UAE. These include the resources supplied by the Bible Society which provides shops within Church compounds in Jabal Ali (Dubai), Sharjah, Al Ain and Abu Dhabi.⁹⁸

Many churches and denominations take their cue from such a sentiment, reaching out to “others” who include those who are marginalized and powerless, like the migrant laborers. Many practical ministries support workers in labor camps and help people who have “fallen foul of their employers.”⁹⁹

Bible Society work in the Gulf began in 1880 under the jurisdiction of the Bible Society in Lebanon. The Bible Society in the Gulf (BSG), formed in 1999 is a member of the United Bible Societies (UBS) worldwide fellowship and provides all the Scripture needs of the churches and denominations in the Gulf. The BSG runs resource centers (Bible shops) within church compounds and provides the Christian community with Scriptures in over 60 different languages. Currently, the BSG runs 22 resource centers in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE (Appendix C). The BSG is “the only ecumenical organization that different church traditions in the region cooperate with. This is not surprising because the Bible Society has an evangelistic orientation geared to work among migrant workers in the labor camps by producing and supplying Scripture materials for them.”¹⁰⁰ Under the leadership of a General Secretary, BSG is actively involved in engaging people, especially migrant laborers, with the Scriptures and its message of hope. A variety of formats serve this purpose:

⁹⁸ Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE*, 156.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁰⁰ Graham, “The Gulf Church, Migrant Workers and Muslim Society,” 8.

printed material, the latest audiovisual innovations, storytelling, and training seminars.¹⁰¹

Migrant laborers: globally and locally

Global trends

Globalization and technology have created working conditions that not only help the economies of traditional nation-states reach farther, faster, deeper and cheaper around the world but also create a new mobility and set of opportunities for individuals to do so.¹⁰² Today more individuals cross borders in search of work and better opportunities than ever before, leading to a huge diaspora of laborers and a migrant work force.¹⁰³

Migration, defined as “a consequence of differentiated economic opportunities across region or countries, especially earnings differentials,” is a major feature of the 21st century.¹⁰⁴ According to the International Organization for Migration, around 200 million foreign migrants live in host countries while another 100 million are on the move within the boundaries of their own countries.¹⁰⁵ Studies of migration show its changing nature and scope: a high rate of migration from less developed countries to more developed ones; emergence of more low skilled laborers in developed countries

¹⁰¹ “Reaching Diaspora Communities in a Rapidly Changing World.” A report prepared for the United Bible Societies by members of the 2011/2012 Academy of Leadership and Management.

¹⁰² Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Picador, 2000), xix.

¹⁰³ Randy Capps et al, “A Profile of the Low Wage Immigrant Workforce,” http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310880_lowwage-immig_wkfc.pdf (accessed January 28, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Flore Gubert and Christophe Nordman, “The Future of International Migration to OECD Countries-Regional Note, North Africa OECD Online,” <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/39/43484295.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Escobar, “Mission Fields on the Move,” *Christianity Today* 54, no. 5 (May 2010): 29.

and well-to-do nations; third, the feminization of immigration everywhere; and recent increases in the rates of immigration among middle-class population.¹⁰⁶

Researchers distinguish between migrants as seasonal, project tied, contract, temporary, established, and highly skilled.¹⁰⁷ In line with these classifications, contract migrants work in a country other than their own under contractual arrangements that are job specific and limited in duration and do not allow for a change of jobs. These workers must leave the country once the contract and their employment is over, unless arrangements are made to renew the contract.¹⁰⁸ Migrants categorized as “forced” and “voluntary” are in the first instance refugee workers who leave their country not by their own will but rather because of political unrest or war; and in the second instance workers who leave home voluntarily and for economic reasons.¹⁰⁹

The migrant population in the Gulf

The Middle East comprises the countries of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Palestinian Authorities, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. It is home to the largest pool of migrant workers in the world and as a result the site of one of the most dynamic

¹⁰⁶ Ali Modarres, “Migration and the Persian Gulf,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 2.

¹⁰⁷ R. E. Bilborrow, et al., “International Migration Statistics” (Geneva: International Labor Organization [ILO]), 1997, 33.

¹⁰⁸ K. C. Zachariah, B. A. Prakash, and Rajan Irudaya, “The Impact of Immigration Policy on Indian Contract Migrants: The Case of the United Arab Emirates,” *International Migration* 4, no. 4 (2003): 162.

¹⁰⁹ K. Koser, *International Migration-A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16-17.

economies in the region.¹¹⁰ The migrant population grew from 800,000 in 1970 to 1.8 million in 1975.¹¹¹ Before the Gulf War in 1991 the oil-rich states of the Gulf had 7 million expatriates and 5 million of them were migrant laborers.¹¹² Expatriates are “those who have well paid jobs,” and migrants are “those who work for next to nothing.”¹¹³ In the early 2000s, migrants constituted 72% of the workforce in Saudi Arabia, 82% in Kuwait, 90% in each of Qatar and the UAE.¹¹⁴ According to the latest statistics, the total population of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is 40,317,404. The migrant population constitutes 15,126,596, around 37.51% of the total population. A detailed table, showing the number and composition of the population in each of the GCC countries is presented in Appendix D.¹¹⁵

Two important factors drive the increase of the migrant population in the region: the oil economy and continuous regional conflicts. The exploration of oil in the GCC countries during the 1960s and 1970s encouraged increased migrant labor movement, while the Arab-Israeli conflicts in 1947, 1967, and 1973, the first Gulf

¹¹⁰ Helene Thiollet, “Migration as Diplomacy: Labor Migrants, Refugees, and Arab Regional Politics in the Oil-Rich Countries,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79 (Spring 2011): 103, 117.

¹¹¹ Haba Nassar and Ahmed Ghoneim, “Trade and Migration, Are they Compliments or Substitute: A Review of Four MENA Countries,” *Economic Research Forum* (March 2002): 9.

¹¹² Sharon Stanton Russell and Michael Teitelbaum, “International Migration and International Trade,” World Bank Discussion paper no. 160 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1992), 9.

¹¹³ Barbara Degorge, “Modern Day Slavery in the United Arab Emirates,” *The European Legacy* 11, no. 6 (2006): 661-662.

¹¹⁴ National Statistical Units and Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/migration> (accessed January 31, 2013).

¹¹⁵ “Trends in International Migrant Stock, United Nations, Operation World,” 7th edition, and CIA World Factbook, 2010.

War between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1991 and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 paved the way for more migration.¹¹⁶

During British colonial times the presence of Asian workers increased substantially. In the 1930s, for example, the British hired large numbers of Indian workers in order that British interests could have more control of the oil in the Gulf.¹¹⁷ After the Second World War demand for oil production grew and created the need for foreign labor in the Gulf countries. This demand was satisfied primarily by laborers from the Arab countries, namely, Egypt, Yemen and to a lesser extent from Syria, Jordan and Palestine. All categories of workers, including domestic laborers and construction workers, joined the public and private sectors.¹¹⁸ The economic and demographic character of migration took a different shape as a result of the late 1980's economic recession. Economists agree that the collapse of oil revenues caused neither a large-scale re-export of foreign labor nor a drastic fall in regional migration levels. The recession impacted mainly migration trends. More laborers seemed to pour in from the eastern hemisphere of the globe, particularly from South Asian countries, than from Arab countries.¹¹⁹ In fact, not relying too much on Arab labor force helped the GCC countries to have more autonomy and freedom in dealing with the many problematic regional and international political issues and concerns.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Sharon Stanton Russell, "International Migration and Political Turmoil in the Middle East," *Population and Development Review* 18 (1992): 719-720.

¹¹⁷ I. J. Seccombe and R. I. Lawless, "Dependence on Foreign Workers in the Gulf and the International Oil Companies: 1910-1950," *International Migration Review* 20 (1986): 557-558.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaheid, eds., *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, vol. 11 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 301-302.

¹²⁰ Thiollot, "Migration as Diplomacy," 107.

Asian migration to the Gulf faced a more complex situation after the 1980s, when many nationalities, such as South Korean, Taiwanese, Indonesian, Filipino, and Thai came to the region. Unemployment, poverty and lack of job opportunities in the beginning of the 1970s urged many Indians from the Southern Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to seek employment opportunities in the GCC countries.¹²¹

South Asian presence, however, was not new to the GCC region. Historical records show that South and West Asia had established trade and cultural ties with the Middle East dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization of the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (2600 BC to 1700 BC). Settlers lived in the Indus River basin but migrated into regions that are known today as Pakistan, Afghanistan and northwest India.¹²² Indians arrived in the Gulf in pre-Islamic times as laborers and refugees. During the Indo-Arab Golden Age of Trade, large numbers of Indian merchants and professionals settled in the Gulf.¹²³ According to records kept by Vasco de Gama and dated to around 1498, the presence of Indians in the Red Sea ports and the interior parts of the Gulf was an established fact.¹²⁴

The migrant community in the UAE

¹²¹ Jain Prakash, "Indian labor migration to the Gulf countries," Gulf Research Center, May 2006, 15-16.

¹²² "The British Museum-Indus Valley," http://www.ancientindia.co.uk/indus/home_set.html (accessed January 30, 2013).

¹²³ Jain Prakash, *Non Resident Indian entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2010), 21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

The UAE is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world after Saudi Arabia and Iran with a quota of 2.53 million barrels per day.¹²⁵ The former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Anan described Dubai as “one of the world’s greatest economic miracles.”¹²⁶ Besides the unprecedented boom in the oil sector, the UAE also witnessed a “growth by double digit percentage” in retail trade, construction and tourism.¹²⁷ Keane attributes this titanic advancement to “the sizeable South Asian Workforce, whose labor has contributed enormously to the growth and without whom the vast development could not have taken place, has not shared in the wealth.”¹²⁸

The average immigrant worker in the UAE earns around USD 175 a month, or less than 10% of the average per capita income in the UAE.¹²⁹ The recruitment process begins in the workers’ home countries.¹³⁰ The workers’ pay recruiting agencies large fees so that they can obtain visa sponsorships in the UAE. These unlawful fees can range anywhere between USD 2000 to 3000.¹³¹ The workers borrow the money from agencies in their home countries on condition that they will pay them back from the wages they will earn in the UAE.¹³² The system is called *Kafil*, which is Arabic for sponsor. In fact, this system also applies to all foreign businesses that wish to do business in the UAE. Businesses have to have a local

¹²⁵ “Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Monthly Oil Market Report,” June 2007, www.opec.org/home/Monthly%20Oil%20Market%20Reports/2007/pdf/MR062007.pdf (accessed January 30, 2013).

¹²⁶ *Gulf News*, 7 February 2006.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Building Towers, Cheating Workers: Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in the United Arab Emirates,” Nov. 2006, 21.

¹²⁸ David Keane and Nicholas McGeehan, “Enforcing Workers’ Rights in the United Arab Emirates,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 15 (2008): 82.

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch UAE report, *supra* note 111, 23.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 27.

Emirati business partner, a *Kafil*, to be able to operate in the UAE.¹³³ Hickox explains the system thus:

In the UAE, the guest worker may work for no one than his sponsor unless he leaves the country and returns under a new sponsorship... This system, as applied to lower level positions, has been analogized to slavery. The system is so characterized because the employer is tied to one employer.¹³⁴

Even though the UAE is a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) it has signed neither core ILO Convention No 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organize nor Convention No 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. These Conventions are described as being “among the founding principles of the ILO.”¹³⁵

Several sources underscore the fact that the UAE has repeatedly failed to protect the basic human rights of its migrant workers.¹³⁶ “Slaves building monuments” is the expression one study used to characterize the fate of the thousands of workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries currently employed to build the infrastructure of Saadiyat Island. This is a US\$27 billion project, which will host branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim museums, a campus of the New York University (NYU), and other international institutions.¹³⁷

¹³³ Basma Al Jandalay, “Service Agents Import Workers Illegally, Say Sponsoring Companies,” *Gulf News*, October 17, 2007.

¹³⁴ Stacy Hickox, “Labor Market Needs and Social Policy: Guest workers in West Germany and the Arab Gulf States,” *Comparative Labor Law Journal* 8, no. 4 (summer 1987): 369-370.

¹³⁵ International Labor Organization, “Rules of the Game: A Brief Introduction to International Labor Standards,” 2005, 84, [www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/norm/download/resources/rulesofthe game.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/norm/download/resources/rulesofthe%20game.pdf) (accessed February 5, 2013).

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch, “UAE: Draft Labor law Violates International Standards.” March 24, 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/03/24/uae-draft-labor-law-violates-international-standards> (accessed February 5, 2013).

¹³⁷ “Dubai’s Skyscraper stained by the blood of migrant Workers.” www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/may/27/Dubai-migrant-workers-deaths (accessed December 20, 2012).

By law, employers in the UAE are obliged to pay wages to their workers otherwise they would face fines and imprisonment.¹³⁸ Apart from the fact that there is no minimum wage law in the UAE “those who receive low salaries are seen as being better than those who receive none at all.”¹³⁹ Employers who do not pay wages to their laborers, a rampant practice in the UAE, justify their act by arguing that it is sort of a collateral, guarantee that the laborers will remain on the job.¹⁴⁰ So far, human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Watch have not identified cases whereby employers have been fined or charged for not paying or for withholding wages.¹⁴¹

UAE laws do not recognize the right to form labor unions, bargain collectively, or to strike.¹⁴² Instead, the UAE sponsorship system gives employers nearly absolute control over workers’ lawful presence in the country, with visas tied to individual employers who typically confiscate migrant workers’ passports almost on their arrival in the UAE. These conditions mean that workers have little recourse against agencies or employers who exploit them. In 2012, *Forbes* classified the UAE as the least friendly nation for expatriate and migrant workers.¹⁴³

The housing condition of the laborers concerns many observers. Usually, workers live in labor camps, segregated from the rest of the community: “the atrocious policy of constructing labor camps in the UAE represents a practice of de

¹³⁸ UAE Federal Law No. 8, supra note 21, art 56, 181.

¹³⁹ Jessica Caplin, “Mirage in the Desert Oasis: Forced Labor in Dubai and the United Arab Emirates,” *Harvard International Review* 30, no. 4 (winter 2009): 29.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch UAE report, supra note 111, 55.

¹⁴² Ibid., 57.

¹⁴³ <http://www.newzglobe.com/tourism/8613-Forbes-calls-Emirates-least-friendly-country.html> (accessed February 25, 2013)

facto segregation between citizens and non-citizens.”¹⁴⁴ The housing situation has created a feeling of alienation among the migrant community. A study of the migrants’ public spaces in Dubai reports that migrants gather together during their leisure times in “transitory spaces... meant as places to be passed through, discouraging unnecessary lingering and hence attachment.”¹⁴⁵ The study asserts that labor camps disconnect migrants, discourage association, and underline the fact that “the city is not meant to be theirs.”¹⁴⁶ Another study draws attention to the camps as places where “inequitable squatting conditions serve to create separate and unequal geographies.”¹⁴⁷

Conditions in the labor camps create health issues. An article ran in the *Gulf News*, reporting conditions in Al Mussafah labor camp where around 12,000 workers shared cramped, unbelievably small rooms each containing up to 20 beds. The article stated, “cramped living conditions and poor wages make migrant workers highly susceptible to communicable diseases which often develop into serious health problems.”¹⁴⁸ The same article quotes Rajeh el Fahel, head of the Health Education Section in the Ministry of Health, who stated that he was “shocked at the conditions the men in workers’ accommodations live in.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ David Keane and Nicholas McGeehan, “Enforcing Workers’ Rights in the United Arab Emirates,” *International Journal on Minority and group Rights* 15 (2008): 100.

¹⁴⁵ Yasser Elsheshtawy, “Transitory Sites: Mapping Dubai’s ‘Forgotten’ Urban Spaces,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 4 (2008): 965.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 985.

¹⁴⁷ Ali Modarres, “Migration and the Persian Gulf-Demography, Identity and the Road to Equitable Policies,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 10.

¹⁴⁸ *Gulf News*, April 9, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Suicides are increasing and present another issue. In 2005, 84 suicide cases were recorded among migrant workers; whereas, in 2004 there were 70 cases only.¹⁵⁰ The reports provided by the police in Dubai draw a grimmer picture, reporting 113 suicide cases in 2009.¹⁵¹ In May 2011, Athiraman Kannon, a 32-year-old Indian foreman, jumped to his death from the 147th floor of Burj al Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Local media reported that Kannon jumped to his death after his employer had denied granting him leave to go home. His death was the 26th known suicide by an Indian worker in the UAE in 2011.¹⁵² After listening to a Dubai psychiatrist's explanation of the suicide of a worker whose employer had withheld his wages and refused to give him money for medical treatment, Keane wrote,

When those workers reach here and they realize what they have gotten themselves into and see that they've lost everything, they react to it. They feel trapped as they now know they can't go back either. There's no escape. They know that they are in a bonded labor type of situation and are reacting to what they think is the biggest mistake in their life, an irreparable loss. It is the reaction to this loss which can lead to suicidal contemplation.¹⁵³

The situation of female migrant workers differs but is no less tragic. Most female migrants work as maids. Unpaid wages, food deprivation, long working hours, forced confinement, burns, hair pulling and cutting, and verbal and sexual abuse are among the abuses they endure.¹⁵⁴ Feelings of loneliness, foreignness, discomfort in a hot climate, discrimination, and lack of access to the culture of the UAE are some of

¹⁵⁰ Caplin, "Mirage in the Desert Oasis," 30.

¹⁵¹ ITUC Report, "Hidden frames of the Gulf rivals, International Trade Union Congress, Brussels, Belgium," www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/VS_QatarEN.final.pdf (accessed December 30, 2012).

¹⁵² "Dubai's Skyscraper stained by the blood of migrant Workers." www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/may/27/Dubai-migrant-workers-deaths (accessed December 28, 2012).

¹⁵³ Keane and McGeehan, "Enforcing Migrant Worker's Rights in UAE," 111.

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch World Report, "World Report UAE." www.hrw.org/world-report/world-report-2012-united-arab-emirate (accessed December 30, 2012).

the issues that maids deal with.¹⁵⁵ Sometimes maids who are subject to physical abuse run away from their household with no money and no passport. They seek refuge in safe houses where they stay while their cases are being handled by their respective embassies or an NGO. 91 housemaid abuse incidents were recorded in the UAE in 2011.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, most female migrant workers work in private homes where law enforcement is very limited or non-existent.¹⁵⁷

The churches, NGOs and the BSG operate in such a context and for such a group of people whose status has been described as “slavery”, a condition that echoes Oscar Wilde’s words in *The Young King* written in 1892,

In war the strong make slaves of the weak, and in peace the rich make slaves of the poor. We must work to live, and they give us such mean wages that we die. We toil for them all day long, and they heap up gold in their coffers, and our children fade away before their time, and the faces of those we love become hard and evil. We tread out grapes, and another drinks the wine. We sow the corn, and our own board is empty. We have chains, though no eye beholds them; and are slaves, though men call us free.¹⁵⁸

In conclusion, this Chapter presented a brief history of the Gulf and the UAE, followed by the political, demographic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic context of the UAE. It then focused on the historical presence of the Christian Church, starting from the earliest centuries to the present day. The Chapter also described the ministry of Christian Scripture from the earliest years to the present time. Finally, it concluded with an overview of the migrant situation, globally and

¹⁵⁵ Rima Sabban, “Broken Spaces; Bounded Realities: Foreign Female Domestic Workers in the UAE,” PhD diss., The American University, 1996, 178-184.

¹⁵⁶ Sofoh H. Hassane and Abdullah Sief Abdullah, “Exploring the most Prevalent Social Problems in the United Arab Emirates,” *International Journal of Academic Research* 3, no. 2 (March 2013): 572.

¹⁵⁷ Pardis Mahdavi and Christine Sargent, “Questioning the Discursive Construction of Trafficking and Forced Labor in the United Arab Emirates,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 7, no. 3 (fall 2011): 19.

¹⁵⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Young King and Other Stories* (London: Longman, 1988), 25.

locally and outlined the socio-economic and cultural challenges migrants face during their employment in the UAE.

CHAPTER TWO

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

Introduction

This chapter reviews and discusses Bible Engagement (BE) and examines its impact on effecting change. It also investigates the concept of Biblical hope, the main focus of this study. It explores the characteristics of the three main formats (printed, audio, and storytelling) used by the BSG as BE tools. The last section gives some background information on the ethno-linguistic Telugu migrant group, the focus of this research, in order to understand the implications of the cultural and socio-linguistic characteristics of this particular group on their understanding and making meaning of the Biblical concept of hope.

Bible Engagement: the process of Christian change

For many churches and denominations, the Bible is the essence and foundation of the Christian Church. Different church traditions have different interpretations of the message of the Bible; nevertheless, the Scriptures play a central role in the life of the church and in relation to other writings.¹⁵⁹ Various interpretations of the Scriptures enhance the traditions and values of Christianity and the Church. These interpretations challenge the Church and its communities to examine its own behaviors as well as those of other people and to connect these behaviors to the

¹⁵⁹ Wilfred C. Smith, *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 212.

message of the Bible that directs our attention to past biblical history and to the days to come.¹⁶⁰

Mugambi and Guy illustrate the role of biblical theology when they say that theology is either “for all, or contextual theologies for all... Otherwise, prejudice reigns supreme. Nevertheless, whether it is for all or contextualized, the ultimate aim of the theology is to change history.”¹⁶¹ Weber elaborates the change process by relating it to charisma, which inspires religious, ethical, social, political and artistic beliefs and manifestations and revolutionizes a person from within by changing hearts, a goal he calls metanoia.¹⁶² Blumer observes that human beings have a “self” and that their actions and the changes they go through are constructed not released. For him, social change in society is a result of the “actions” of people, whereby they initiate new actions when change takes place.¹⁶³

Du Bois believes that no matter what we do, physical differences play a significant role in human progress. He builds his argument on the assumption that “the history of the world is not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history.”¹⁶⁴ Mugambi and Guy argue that theology requires human progress because Jesus started the change process with his

¹⁶⁰Joseph Crockett, *Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as They Engage Scripture Texts* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 111.

¹⁶¹Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Michael R. Guy, *Contextual Theology Across Cultures* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2009), 310.

¹⁶²Max Weber, “The Nature of Charismatic Domination,” in *Social Theory Roots and Branches*, ed. Peter Kivisto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91-92.

¹⁶³Herbert Blumer, “Symbolic Interaction, Phenomenology, and Ethnomethodology,” in *Social Theory Roots and Branches*, ed. Peter Kivisto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 242.

¹⁶⁴E. B. Du Bois, “The Conversation of Races,” in *Social Theory Roots and Branches* ed. Peter Kivisto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 134-135.

disciples and went on changing each and every person He met.¹⁶⁵ For them the Christian Church and its communities are an integral part of this same human history and are equally responsible for changing history by changing the people they encounter, irrespective of their national, ethnic and cultural identities.¹⁶⁶

BE, as a relevant, powerful experience is an example of such personal and social change. The Forum of Bible Agencies International defines BE as “encountering God’s Word in a life-changing way.”¹⁶⁷ Fergus Macdonald, former General Secretary of the UBS, refers to BE as “the ways Christian leaders and communities help people interact with the Bible as the Word of God.”¹⁶⁸ For Troop BE means “processes in the ways by which people learn and apply it best for their life.”¹⁶⁹ Crockett prefers to define BE as a whole, and for him it “builds meanings, coordinates different lines of thinking and explains actions of people and communities” such as parents who seek answers for everyday family conflicts and for the upbringing of their children and religious leaders who share with their constituencies issues related to the meaning of life.¹⁷⁰ For Bourdieu BE deals with “the readers’ perception” and “is based on the one hand on the perception of his/her habits and norms in life and how they relate it to the social structures in which they

¹⁶⁵ Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Michael R. Guy, *Contextual Theology Across Cultures* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2009), 320.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁶⁷ The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI), <http://hope.scripture-engagement.org/> (accessed February 11, 2013).

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Crockett, *Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as They Engage Scripture Texts* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 98.

¹⁶⁹ John Troop, “Learning Methods and Bible Engagement,” *The Clergy Journal* (March 2008): 16-17.

¹⁷⁰ Crockett, *Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations*, 97.

live.”¹⁷¹ Bruner and Goodman believe that while BE encourages an individual to “perceive, interpret, take position and make a meaning of a text, it also helps the reader to reason on the text which he or she is reading and the way it connects it to his/her daily life issues.”¹⁷² They assert that this perception also includes the study of the variations that one undergoes and deals with real life circumstances like poverty, hunger, love, pain or any other particular issue in his/her life, hence, it is directly linked and interrelated with all the challenges in one’s life.¹⁷³

According to Kybird, Bible education and its engagement have three polarities: first, individual-institutional which deals with issues of the interest of the person and the community; second, equilibrium-utopian which deals with the context and motivation of the overall learning and educational process; and third, text-function which deals with the method and resources of addressing the issues.¹⁷⁴

Crockett relates these three polarities of BE to adapting the human action into the social act through the “construction and reconstruction of religious interpretations and meanings in conversation with communities of shared meaning.”¹⁷⁵

For the UBS, BE is a concept that emphasizes “making the Bible discoverable, accessible and relevant; that includes both making the Bible recoverable and discoverable as Sacred Scripture, and making Scriptures accessible as a place of life

¹⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Social Theory* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 14.

¹⁷² J. Bruner and C. C. Goodman, “Value and Need as Organizing Factors in Perception,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 42 (1947): 33.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Kybird, “Using the Bible in Adult Christian Education,” *JATE* 3, no. 1 (2006): 51.

¹⁷⁵ Crockett, *Engaging Scripture*, 115.

enhancing and life transforming encounter.”¹⁷⁶ In the year 2000, in a globalized world characterized by a “loss of boundaries”, the UBS saw the need “to move from distribution targets to engagement and encounter, from biblical illiteracy to transformational change, and from sales strategies to shared communication.”¹⁷⁷ It was imperative for the UBS to move from “Bible needs: translate, print, and distribute” to “mission strategies: create new products that encourage people to understand and engage personally with Scripture and develop appropriate biblical materials for non-literate people and new readers.”¹⁷⁸

For many, a globalized world threatens identity, certainty and authority and thus impacts the religious, economic and social life of people around the globe. Mitchell argues that this prevailing situation is creating relativism because people are losing traditional and local values in their lives and putting less faith in institutions. Their emotions are overriding their rational powers while at the same time their personal and community lives fragment more and more. One consequence is that Christian faith loses its importance and validity in people’s lives. Even though Church means less and less for people, these same people are in a spiritual journey trying to find coherence and integration. People are aiming for “the personal story even though they have lacked confidence in the big story. For them the human story has immense validity.”¹⁷⁹ Schweitzer argues that people and communities are caught in a state of paradox in dealing with their ground realities. He believes that the loss of

¹⁷⁶ Bill Mitchell, “UBS reborn? Scripture engagement in a globalised world,” www.edinburgh2010.org/.../papersdocuments5cd2.pdf?, 3-4 (accessed March 22, 2013).

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Schweitzer, “Fundamentalism: A Challenge for Biblical Pastoral Ministry,” *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 70/71 (2009): 14.

¹⁷⁸ *The Declaration from Midrand*, United Bible Societies World Assembly in Midrand, South Africa, October 2000, 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ Mitchell, “UBS reborn,” www.edinburgh2010.org/.../papersdocuments5cd2.pdf?, 3-4 (accessed March 22, 2013).

identity is paralleled by a search for personhood and community. Schweitzer maintains that people need to complement a global world by the local and the individual. Even though people are losing certainty, they are still eager to find meaning and significance. This new search seems to contrast with authoritarianism, fundamentalism in religious, ethnic and nationalistic contexts and realities.¹⁸⁰

A UBS Americas Consultation in 2000 described these postmodern realities as “the rejection of metanarratives, the loss of confidence in reason and the sciences, a sense of deception with the idea of sustained progress, and a frustration with unfulfilled promises of betterment.”¹⁸¹ The UBS World Assembly in 2000 in Midrand, South Africa, followed this Consultation up and announced a new position statement on identity and ethos. The Assembly emphasized that the Bible Society movement is a worldwide Fellowship that endeavors to fulfill the Great Commission with members from over 137 countries. It stressed the commitment of Bible Societies to serve churches of all Christian confessions and to seek partnership with church-related agencies. The Assembly was equally conscious of the context in which Bible Societies are called to achieve this great task: 300 million people speak languages which do not have any published Scripture portion of God’s Word; one half of the world’s population is functionally illiterate; the United Nations has classified a majority of people as “absolutely poor”; and millions are under the threat of religious fundamentalism and other pagan influences. In Midrand, the UBS embraced four working strategies in an attempt to deal with pressing post-modern problems: First, to create new tools and products that encourage people to read or otherwise encounter

¹⁸⁰ Schweitzer, “Fundamentalism,” 16.

¹⁸¹ *Declaration de Barueri II*, UBS Americas Consultation in Barueri, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 6-8 March, 2007.

Scripture with special attention to groups concerned with specific issues (such as youth, family and poverty) and situations (such as AIDS and natural disasters) and available in all formats, including non-print media; second, create new products that encourage people to understand and engage personally with Scripture; third, look for ways in which we can work with others in holistic programs, serving the whole person, recognizing our unique contribution of bringing the Word of Life and Hope to people in need; and fourth, develop appropriate biblical materials for non-literate people and new readers.¹⁸²

After the 2004 World Assembly in Newport, Wales, where the theme was “The Unchanging Word for a Changing World”, and the 2010 Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, where the UBS Global Board defined Scripture Engagement and advocacy for Scripture as increasingly central aspects of its ministry, individual Bible Societies embarked, at different intervals, on drawing up BE programs to “achieve the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures and of helping people interact with the Word of God.”¹⁸³ One such engagement program with highest visibility, for example, is the Good Samaritan program where Bible Societies work with African churches to bring a Bible-based approach to their involvement with those affected by the HIV-AIDS pandemic. To this purpose, the Nordic Bible Societies invested heavily in this program and were even able to access government funding to great effect. More than twenty African Bible Societies now participate in the Good Samaritan program.¹⁸⁴ Another BE success story comes from the British and Foreign Bible Societies (BFBS): “Making the Bible Heard.” This

¹⁸²United Bible Societies, “The Direction from Midrand,” World Assembly 2000, 2.

¹⁸³ *UBS Global Board Report*, UBS World Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, September 2010, 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

initiative, which was the direct result of the World Assemblies, aimed to make the Bible “available, accessible and credible” in post-modern England.¹⁸⁵ They aim to connect the cultural, personal and biblical perspectives of the community with the transforming culture of the Word. What the BFBS is endeavoring is to achieve a transformational change in society by telling stories in contemporary controversial set ups and working openly in the community at large. They are trying to identify the “drivers” of change in the society and to influence the change makers in order to bring the Bible - the book which is at the edge of the community - back into the center. The BFBS’s Strategies of Scripture Engagement has led to developments in the media, arts, politics and education in England. Their engagement initiatives have led to “change the conversation and re-tell the story.”¹⁸⁶ A final example is the initiative taken by the Bible Society in Peru (BSP). A country where 51% of women between 15 and 49 years old suffer from physical violence and where spousal abuse and child abuse are major concerns, the BSP developed Bible-based materials for use by churches - *Alto a La Violencia* - to create critical awareness and action on spousal abuse.¹⁸⁷ This was later extended to take into account the situation of sexual abuse of children and adolescents with materials for use in and by churches as well as by a network of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) working in this area. An agreement has also been signed with the government’s *Ministerio de la Mujer y Desarrollo Social* to develop a program using these materials in the nation’s schools.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.christianmarketplace.org.uk/engine.cfm=43&cma=1717> (accessed March 22, 2013).

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell, “UBS reborn?”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

The UBS responded to the changing cultural contexts by recovering Biblical patterns for mission and emphasizing that God's mission is the source of mission, Jesus Christ is its embodiment, the Holy Spirit is the power for mission, and the Church is the instrument of the mission.¹⁸⁹ Mitchell observes that the UBS has not only been able to change its strategies and prioritize its mission but has also managed to contextualize and implement them in the lives of specific countries. The latter reality has placed the UBS on a frontline that can and does play a "key role in contemporary mission, global and local."¹⁹⁰

Biblical hope: the essence of Christian change

Brueggemann believes that the Old Testament is a book of hope, and it "articulates hope in one form as the anticipation of a Messiah who will fulfill YHWH's promises, i.e., the Messianic Hope."¹⁹¹ For Brueggemann, hope is in the God of creation and exodus, the one who creates the "impossible" and is "funded by old memories."¹⁹² Hope arises from a state of hopelessness where past experiences tell against new possibilities.

Ateek describes the second exodus as the time when people started developing a new understanding of the issue of land, which eventually established the notion of hope and of accepting the changes that started to take place in history. In fact, God through the prophets helped the people to accept these changes.¹⁹³ Ateek believes that Old Testament hope is articulated in YHWH's promises: in Isaiah, for example, hope

¹⁸⁹ Mitchell, "UBS reborn?"

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 344.

¹⁹² Ibid., 343.

¹⁹³ Naim S. Ateek, "A Palestinian Perspective: Biblical Perspectives on the Land," in *Voices from the Margins*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (London: Orbis Books, 1995), 271.

lies in the fact that God has a plan to restore the fortunes of Israel to create shalom; in Ezekiel hope is concerned with the acknowledgment and acceptance of YHWH's holiness; and in Daniel it is a radical, apocalyptic hope.¹⁹⁴ The latter anticipates that God will be fully God, will enact an extreme show of sovereign power, will make a complete break, and will make all things new.

Brueggemann argues that the task of prophetic ministry and imagination is to bring people to "engage their experiences of suffering and death."¹⁹⁵ The latter is an experience that energizes and links people to hope. This hope will help the individual "to cut through the despair and to penetrate the dissatisfied coping that seems to have no end or resolution."¹⁹⁶ The newness in one's life is given by God and is supposed to be the only serious source of energy. It is at this point where Exodus is linked with what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus' death-resurrection was the ultimate Exodus where we learn that hope is never generated among us but always given to us.¹⁹⁷ This means hope has a source and is an agent of "newness" which comes through Jesus.¹⁹⁸ In this respect, hope cannot be learned but experienced and "caught."¹⁹⁹ For Brueggemann, the ultimate aim is the formation of an alternative community with an alternative consciousness so that the dominant community "may be criticized and finally dismantled. But more than dismantling the old community, the purpose of the alternative community is to enable a new human beginning to be made."²⁰⁰ He

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 358.

¹⁹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 41.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 101.

¹⁹⁸ Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 96.

¹⁹⁹ Henry Mitchell, "Catching Hope," *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 8.

²⁰⁰ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 101.

maintains that Jesus dismantled the world through His crucifixion and practiced the energizing of the new future given by God that was fully manifested in His resurrection, in which He embodied the new future given by God.²⁰¹ To explain, Brueggemann refers to the vision in Psalm 68 where in the “new setup” governance heaven and earth are all linked with each other. He then challenges his readers to live their lives, striving each to get closer to this “regime.”²⁰² In fact, he states, hope helps humankind to come closer to this regime because it helps them not only to get to Good Friday but also to Easter Sunday where they can discover “the hope which shall not disappoint us” (Romans 5:4). Brueggemann explains that hope has a solid foundation which is based on the reality of God who is alive and whose love helps human beings to “know and to be known.”²⁰³

Burghardt asserts that with Christian hope “you can cope: confront fear, eyeball to eyeball, live, even joyously, with your fears” because the promise of Jesus is so true. He supports his assertion by quoting John 16:22: “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”²⁰⁴ Rasmussen maintains that Christian hope generates “the hope which arises from looking at the wounds but seeing things healed and whole. Hope surges when we see the fractures healed in a vision of harmony and unity.”²⁰⁵ For Macquarrie Christian hope is “total” as it “touches on all aspects of human life, both

²⁰¹ Ibid., 116.

²⁰² Brueggemann. *Mandate to Difference*, 6.

²⁰³ James L. Kidd, “Our Hope is in the reality of God,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 45.

²⁰⁴ Walter J. Burghardt, “Threats to Hope,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 7.

²⁰⁵ Larry L. Rasmussen, “Hope and the Environment,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 19.

individual and social. As a total hope, it is not limited or nullified by death.”²⁰⁶

Donahue highlights the image of Christian hope in the parable of the prodigal son, where the two sons relate to their father through a “form of slavery - either a slavery restored after moral failure or slavery cultivated to please a stern parent. Between the dutiful and prodigal son is often a haunting bond.” The bond is the hope of Jesus, that is, the father, who breaks every boundary and social convention to nurture freedom in his children.²⁰⁷

For Stork hope has two levels: this worldly (progressive) and other worldly (revolutionary).²⁰⁸ The first level aims at making the earthly life a favorable place to live in, where God and humans cooperate to meet God’s purposes for the universe. The second level aims at the total transformation of human existence. In the first level, Stork explains, hope includes communion with God and with His community. This relationship will eventually lead to the second level of a “transformed existence” where humankind experiences eternal life while living in the present world. For Stork, hope through the Scriptures will help the individual to see this transformed existence of eternity while endeavoring in the earthly life. Similarly, Buechner claims that helping people to engage with hope is to help them see what is happening in the world and in their own lives.²⁰⁹ He asserts that hope requires a community of faith and action that consists of people who have the “courage to speak out of the living truth.”²¹⁰ Delaplane finds the challenge of Christian hope in the reality that it helps

²⁰⁶ John Macquarrie, “Hope as Idea and Reality,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 21.

²⁰⁷ John R. Donahue, “Parables as Images of Hope,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 13.

²⁰⁸ Peter Stork, “Hope: Essential and Abundant,” http://hope.aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf-file/0008/--/Stock_Hope_Gh.pdf (accessed February 13, 2013).

²⁰⁹ Frederick Buechner, “Preaching on Hope,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 5.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

the person and the community to stay away from being paralyzed by fear and have the courage to act. The result of this action is a change of life. Delaplane quotes Chittister who argues that “The Resurrection did not change the world; it changed the apostles who are supposed to change the world. And change is what it is all about.”²¹¹

Bloch defines similar patterns of hope and change but through a different socio-economic context and perspective. He believes that hope is superior to fear and that it is “neither passive like the latter nor locked into nothingness.”²¹² Bloch argues that people have always believed in the dream for a “better life” and the fact that everybody “lives in the future, because they strive, past things only come later, and as yet genuine present is almost never there at all.”²¹³ In this respect, the future dimension contains what is feared or what is hoped for. He relates human expectation to hope which is an intention “towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole.”²¹⁴ Bloch maintains in “hoping beyond the day which has become” which is achievable by bidding “farewell to the closed, static concept of being... the world is full of prosperity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfillment of the intending.”²¹⁵

Bible tools: the mediums for Christian change

²¹¹ Joan Delaplane, “A Future Full of Hope,” *The Living Pulpit* (January-March 2012): 15.

²¹² Ernest Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), 1.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

Catholicos Aram I describes the Bible as God's revelation, a unique, sacred and absolute value for Christianity.²¹⁶ He underscores the urgency to translate the Bible into the life of the community with the aim of impacting and changing people's lives.²¹⁷ Kybird states that the Bible gives identity to a given group.²¹⁸ He explains that individuals look at life through different perspectives that are usually affected by a number of internal and external psychological and social factors. These different factors make Scripture use a unique experience for each person in view of his or her age, gender, family, education, income, etc. Bible reading also depends on the intentions and abilities of the reader to understand and make meaning. Kybird argues that since social, cultural and religious traditions and situations play a key role in Bible use there is an urgency to understand various cultures and to link the message of the Bible to the other's language, culture and ideologies.²¹⁹

The arguments presented above underscore the imperative of choosing the right BE tools/formats/resources for the right audience. This is a fundamental issue for consideration. Based on the revised mission strategy adopted by the UBS and its long years of ministry among multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic church groups and individuals in the Muslim-dominated milieu of the Gulf in general and the UAE in particular, the BSG has learned to rely on a variety of Scripture formats for its BE programs: printed, audiovisual and storytelling. The BSG provides the printed and audio formats of the Bible and New Testament in more than 77 languages (Appendix F contains a detailed list of the languages and the different formats). The

²¹⁶ Aram I, *Taking the Church to the People* (Beirut: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 2011), 52.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Paul Kybird, "Using the Bible in Adult Christian Education," *JATE* 3, no. 1 (2006): 50.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

BSG provides these different BE tools and services because it believes that the Bible is “of utmost significance in shaping the adult Christian as a mature person in Christ.”²²⁰

The storytelling tool

To explain storytelling, Dewey uses the definition put forward by the Network of Biblical Story Tellers: “a means of inclusion in community, an understanding of evangelism as welcoming outsiders into a storied fellowship that is engaged in this activity as a spiritual discipline for the strengthening of relationships in the body of Christ.”²²¹ Dewey adds that in the shared reality of the narrative “teller and audience came together as a community to meet the risen Christ.”²²² Storytelling, with a social setting in oral culture, travels easily from person to person and generation to generation. It is a fertile object of study and source of “the insights of socio-political analysis and other approaches to the texts that attempt to understand them in their fullness and not as mere historical or scientific truth.”²²³ Stories connect people with each other, those who are still living and those who are dead. Storytelling helps each person to connect his/her own story with the stories of other people (living and dead) and even more than that, with the story of God.²²⁴

Albert believes that an individual life is made of stories that people get from their parents. For him, stories are created out of one’s experiences in different life situations: joy, sorrow, success, failure and still more. By creating these stories, a

²²⁰ Ibid., 54.

²²¹ Ibid., 3.

²²² Dennis Dewey “Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation,” hope.dennisdewey.org (2006): 1.

²²³ Ibid., 2.

²²⁴ Jeffrey Jones, “Telling Stories: Forming Disciples,” *The Clergy Journal* (March 2007): 8.

person creates and recreates his and her own self.²²⁵ Albert insists that the same individual who creates his or her story also needs encouragement to do so.²²⁶ Epston and White endorse the latter argument and add that when people of different ages repeat a story, the same story becomes a “safe” mechanism for each and every one of them to identify it with their own life experiences in which they are navigating.²²⁷ They state that when people read and/or listen to a story, the narrative helps them to look into their own problems in life and try to find ways to deal with them.²²⁸

Atkinson adds a different dimension to the argument. He claims that storytelling is not only a method that helps one to solve people’s problems but that it is equally a spiritual activity that helps people to find themselves, realistically relating the stories to their own life context.²²⁹ Based on her own experiences as a teacher, Unkovich affirms that storytelling is a very powerful tool, whether it is used for telling a story, reading it, using it for teaching, connecting it to and with an idea or for inspiring people.²³⁰

During Jesus’ time, it could be said that the impact made both on His followers and opponents was to no small degree because of His great choice and excellent implementation of the oral medium. As He spoke the message, it carried the

²²⁵ Suzan Wittig Albert, *Writing from Life: Telling your soul’s Story* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1996), ix.

²²⁶ Sanrie de Beer and Julian Muller, “Using Stories to Assist Storytelling in a Pastoral Setting: Four Female Pastors in Dialogue with Mary Magdalene,” *HTS Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (April 2009): 76.

²²⁷ David Epston and Michael White, *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (London: Norton and Company, 1992), 89.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ R. Atkinson., *The Gift of stories: Practical and spiritual applications of autobiography, life stores and personal mythmaking* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvery, 1995), 51.

²³⁰ Anna Unkovich, “The Power of Story: To Teach, to Reach, to Inspire,” *Kapan Magazine* (March 2011): 58.

sense of God's presence, intensity and power that writing fails to convey.²³¹ Kelber believes that the Gospel could not have been maintained without the benefit of an oral culture.²³² For Kelber, stories are refreshing, easily remembered and shared with others. In oral culture words have no existence apart from speaker and hearers, and the meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of each concrete situation.²³³

Convinced that storytelling is indeed a potent tool for the ministry, the BSG introduced this formidable, effective medium to its programs as a powerful tool to transmit the message of the Word of God. Indeed, the discussion above on orality and its benefits provided the BSG with the necessary impetus to organize training seminars, known as Simply The Story (STS), for church leaders to equip them with the knowledge and skills of storytelling. STS, also known as the Oral Bible or storytelling, is an interactive, lively tool that is applicable to all: children, grown-ups, literates, illiterates, lay leaders, and pastors. The objective of STS is to train people in telling Bible stories and to invite listeners to discover the treasures in the stories so that they own and apply the lessons in their lives. First, the audience hears a Bible story three times, and then discusses it with a set of questions in hand. At the end of the exercise, the audience contributes personal insights and applications. As they discuss story after story, they gain more confidence in telling a story to others on their own. They consider: What can we learn about God in this story? What is He telling me today about my present situation? Those who are trained go to the ministry field and engage the migrant communities with the message of the Bible. STS Workbook

²³¹ Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 19.

²³² Ibid., 44.

²³³ Ibid., 92.

has 52 stories and is available in Amharic, Arabic, English, Hindi, Malayalam, Tagalog, Tamil, and Telugu.

STS trains and equips the narrators to present the Bible stories in the way God gave them, as “whole stories.” When the Bible stories are presented in whole, they carry maximum power.²³⁴ Miller believes that “since God gave 75% of the Bible to us in story format, perhaps we should let the Lord tell His whole story.”²³⁵ She explains that out of the 183 times Jesus was asked a question, He responded with a direct answer only three times. All of the other times, Jesus’ response came in the form of a story or a parable. Jesus did not only tell a story but also asked questions and encouraged his listeners to be involved in discussing them.²³⁶ Based on Jesus’ model, STS training does not only help the trainee to hear the Bible story and really feel it but also trains him/her to discuss it in depth. The hearers can look into the story from inside and manage to discover the spiritual information about those in the story. Miller refers to these discoveries as spiritual observations that encourage the listeners to share aloud what they see in the characters. Finally, the storyteller invites the listeners to put themselves in the story and find out how each listener encounters similar challenges and opportunities.²³⁷

Miller highlights the value of Bible storytelling and its greater importance in sharing information when dealing with a community of new learners or illiterates. She states that those who cannot read are by default oral learners. Oral learners do not or cannot take notes, so one of the best ways for them to remember the

²³⁴ Dorothea A. Miller, *Simply the Story Handbook* (New Delhi: Hebron Press, 2006), 11.

²³⁵ Dorothea A. Miller. *Simply the Story Handbook*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Hebron Press, 2012), 14.

²³⁶ Miller, *Simply the Story Handbook*, 11.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

information is by weaving it into a story. Miller argues that information presented to oral learners in concepts, precepts, topics or outline form can hardly be remembered by them, and they will very soon miss it all.²³⁸ She believes that not only literate people can be skilled in critical thinking but that oral learners can also be equally logical and inductive thinkers. Miller bases her argument on the biblical insight that people are created in the image of God, and as such all people are endowed with the gift of reason and rationality and have, since the Fall, had a conscience for moral reasoning even when they reject that reason.

Miller draws our attention to an episode from the book of Acts. Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, who were common, uneducated persons, had angered the Sadducees and other religious leaders for sharing their faith and for preaching and were brought in front of the Council to answer some questions. Peter, led by the Holy Spirit, made a "logical and well-ordered speech" on Jesus and the religious leaders which "cornered their highly educated captors":²³⁹ "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned, ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Miller believes that the same can also happen today: unlearned followers of Jesus listen well to Scripture and then logically discover and teach others many deep truths.²⁴⁰

Oral transmission of a message includes the social factor and dimension. The information in orality is very much dependent on the form and spirit of style, and

²³⁸ Miller, *Simply the Story Handbook*, 2nd ed., 13.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 106.

according to Kelber one could almost say “the form is the soul of the message.”²⁴¹

Goody believes that oral forms can be utilized in a rather flexible way by the performers. Depending on the performer’s skills, one’s speech “may be highly concentrated, full of ambiguity and resonance, poetry in fact.”²⁴² Peabody focuses on the creative implementation of oral patterns where he describes the process as “this mid-state between fixed and free... is the traditional cultural condition.”²⁴³ Finally, Kelber shows that oral transmission reflects and integrates

amnesia, broken paths, and rejection of tradition. The rule of preventive censorship, in the extreme, states that a tradition that cannot overcome the social threshold to communal reception is doomed to extinction. Tradition then becomes composition in transmission. Oral transmission enacts a multiplicity of discrete instances of speech rather than a continuous process of solidification of speech into written forms.²⁴⁴

The printed tool

Snow defines *Reading comprehension* as “a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement in written language.”²⁴⁵ The author categorizes three elements in this process: the reader, the text and the activity or purpose of reading. These elements are “interrelated in reading comprehension and interrelationship that occurs within a larger socio-cultural context that shapes and is shaped by the reader and that interacts with each of the

²⁴¹ Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 23.

²⁴² Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 113.

²⁴³ Berkley Peabody, *The Winged Word: A Study in the Technique of Ancient Greek Oral Composition as Seen Principally through Hesiod’s Works and Days* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1975), 96.

²⁴⁴ Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 29-30.

²⁴⁵ Catherine Snow, *Reading for Understanding, toward an R and D program* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2002), 13.

elements interactively throughout the process of reading.”²⁴⁶ Blount argues that all readings are culturally located and therefore on that basis equal methodologically.²⁴⁷ He asserts that meaningful interpretation is an interaction between the culturally situated contexts of the interpreter and the “polysemous meaning potentials of the text.”²⁴⁸

The transition from orality to literacy was not that straightforward and easy. Gerhardsson doubts whether the written medium was able to “reproduce the full life, power and meaning of the spoken word.”²⁴⁹ He illustrates his assertion by quoting the controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the status of the oral Torah. He believes that the understanding of the oral Torah by the Pharisees was in conflict with that of the Sadducees. The latter situation led to a “conscious and definite formulation of the distinction between written and oral Torah.”²⁵⁰ Gerhardsson states that Jerusalem served as “the doctrinal centre of early Christianity” where the *logos tou kyriou* (Word of the Lord) was taught by the “college of the twelve.”²⁵¹ He observes that the core of the written gospel already existed in the *logos tou kyriou* of the Jerusalem doctrinal authorities.²⁵² Rightly, Apostle Paul stresses that the core of the written Gospel is in the reality that “Christ died for our sins as the Scripture say.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁷ Bryan K. Blount, *Can I get a witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 6.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁴⁹ Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961), 157.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 23.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 276.

²⁵² Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 12.

He was buried and three days later he was raised to life as the Scripture say.”²⁵³

Reiterating Paul’s words, Mathew Henry writes, “The doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. Remove this, and all our hopes for eternity sink at once.”²⁵⁴ Similarly, Brueggemann argues that the resurrection of Jesus is “the ultimate energizing” for the new future which gives people “new identities” and “new ethic”,²⁵⁵ which Paul refers to it as the “changed”: “Not every one of us will die, but we will all be changed” and “our dead and decaying bodies will be changed into bodies that won’t die or decay” (1 Corinthians 15: 51, 53).

Gerhardsson outlines the model of the written text, underlining its transmission processes throughout history. The origin of the transmission is neither in the preaching of the church nor even in Jesus but rather in the Torah, in its written and oral forms, and Jesus was a teacher of the Torah.²⁵⁶ The conditions of the transmission were based on the exegesis of the Jerusalem Church and reactivated by the Easter experience.²⁵⁷ For him, the carriers of the tradition were primarily Jesus and the twelve as “the first link to the chain of the tradition.”²⁵⁸ The technique of transmission was in the process of learning by repetition.²⁵⁹ The medium of transmission was partly oral and partly written in the form of notebooks and private

²⁵³ *Good News Bible*. 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1992), 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

²⁵⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the whole Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

²⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 112.

²⁵⁶ Birger Gerhardsson, *The Origin of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 60.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 328.

scrolls.²⁶⁰ The process of transmission was developed in a rather straight line that started with Jesus, linking up to the “Jesus texts” through the gospels.²⁶¹ Gerhardsson draws our attention to the fact that the changes that took place during the course of the transmission were confined to “interpretative adaptations” as the communal needs colored the tradition but did not create it.²⁶² The transmission clarified and completed but never changed the image of Jesus.²⁶³ The reason for transmitting material was not merely the inspiration or correction of faith but transmission itself: “The information was communicated for its own sake and was not a deliberate act.”²⁶⁴ Gerhardsson confirms that the gospel is the written text where we can find the teachings of Jesus and eyewitness reports and is in line with tradition.²⁶⁵

Trobisch supports the theory that the manuscripts derive from a single archetype that suggests that a single editor or publisher deliberately created the entire package at some very early date. Trobisch believes that the 27 books of the New Testament were assembled by a single editor or editorial group. The latter was the first edition of the Bible and was created around 180 AD. Trobisch finds “commonalities” between Paul’s epistles, the Four Gospel books, Acts with the general epistles and Revelation. These were strong facts to assume that all known copies of the New Testament can be traced to a single archetype.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 335.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

²⁶² Ibid., 46.

²⁶³ Ibid., 75.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Tom Dykstra, “David Trobisch and David Parker on the Origin of the New Testament, the Historical Jesus, and How Manuscripts can Reveal What Texts Conceal,” www.ocabs.org/journal/index.php/jocabs/article/viewFile/4/16 (accessed September 23, 2013).

Kelber observes that oral and written compositions were developed in different circumstances. In the oral context, “performer and audience share in the making of the message” whereas writers write in the absence of the reader at the time and place of writing.²⁶⁷ Everything written becomes “potentially transmissible, and transmissible with verbatim accuracy unheard of in the oral life world.”²⁶⁸ Oral language is always personalized, where speaker and audience together make the situation a reality; whereas, “words come into being” and spoken words can produce the actual reality of the people in life and action. In a sense, language and being, speaker, message, and words are joined together into a kind of unity.²⁶⁹

Since the beginning, there has always been a visual representation of the Word of God in illuminated manuscripts, catacomb drawings, and church architecture. After the invention of printing by Gutenberg, the Christian context, in fact, was very much based on the written word. For a long time, writing remained in the hands of the educated people and scholars who were not that many in those days.²⁷⁰ Wiseman argues that during that same period there was a low level of literacy,²⁷¹ and the ability to read and write remained within a smaller community up until the 19th century.²⁷² Clearly, orality remained a powerful medium long after the introduction of writing.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 13.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.

²⁷¹ D. J. Wiseman, “Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, eds. P. R. Ackroyd and S. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 37.

²⁷² Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 152-153.

²⁷³ Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 17.

The Audiovisual Tool

The audio products the BSG uses for its BE programs are: *The Jesus Film* based on the Gospel of Luke, *God Story*, which describes the message of salvation from Genesis to Revelation, and the New Testament (Appendix E contains a detailed list of the languages these are available in). An ancient Chinese proverb says, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Recent research in neuroscience and visualization proves that the old proverb is a useful illustration in the present, highly advanced postmodern context.

For instance, Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences asserts that human potential lies in the fact that people have a unique blend of capabilities and skills. Gardner identifies eight different intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. He later added existential and moral intelligence to his list.²⁷⁴ Gardner’s “multiple intelligences” is one good explanation of people’s preferences to learning and as to how they cope with the rapid advances in technology in almost all related fields; which has put a tremendous amount of data and information under our disposal. As people are struggling with this huge amount of data, visualization is becoming increasingly important. The main reason behind it is that the human brain is wired to process visual input very differently from text, audio, and sound. The recent technological advances through functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging confirm “a dual coding system through which visuals and text/auditory input are processed in separate channels, presenting the potential for

²⁷⁴ “Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences,” http://www.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/learning/howard_gardner_theory_multiple_intelligences.pdf (accessed September 23, 2013).

simultaneous augmentation of learning.”²⁷⁵ The complexity of today’s global society and the advancement of the technology are urging people not only to learn more but also to think, create, and innovate. The latter implies that people have become extremely efficient in the use of time for learning, as there is the pressure to continuously learn something new.

Kloha describes hermeneutics as the study of how humans make meaning. He highlights the fear of many churchgoers that hermeneutics can destroy meaning rather than help one understand. The institutional fear of the church causes concern that communities are living “after meaning” or in a “post-meaning” world. Kloha affirms that theological hermeneutics takes into account how our theology forms us to hear the Scriptures in a certain way, thereby producing valid meaning. Theological hermeneutics also attempts to make clear and expose what we do naturally in order to evaluate whether the presuppositions we bring to the hearing of the Word are appropriate. This conviction contradicts the classic historical approach to the meaning of a text. The classic historical approach maintains that meaning of the text cannot be made outside the act of reading (hearing) itself.²⁷⁶ Kloha holds that theological hermeneutics must take account of the hearer and find out the nature of and the extent to which human beings mediate all their perceptions, including reading and interpretation. The eye, with its cornea, rods, neurons, etc., not only shapes how but also what is being perceived. Also, the ear drum and the mind determine what is heard.

²⁷⁵ Charles Fadel, “Multimodal Learning Through Media: What the Research Says,” Metri Group, Cisco Systems, 2008, 3.

²⁷⁶ Jeffrey J. Kloha, “Theological hermeneutics after meaning,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 46 (May 2012): 5-6.

Gadamar adds another dimension to the argument when he challenges the community to deal with the problem of one's "situatedness," that is, environment (family, society, workplace) and context.²⁷⁷ He advocates a hermeneutics that is away from methods and that focuses on the Scripture itself which "must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze on the things themselves."²⁷⁸

Eisenstein believes that through the book any individual can have access to knowledge and education,²⁷⁹ while Savran argues that hearing is a clear preference compared to other different perception modes when it comes to engaging the Word of God. He states that the Bible is more perceived through seeing and hearing than any other human sense.²⁸⁰ At times, he argues, these modes of perception may also blend together and enable interaction between various sensory experiences. The most famous example of this is apparent synesthesia at Sina: "And all the people saw the thundering, and the lightening and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoke," in Exodus 20:18. It can be observed that "to see" is a more effective sense of perceiving in the text, but one can also realize simultaneous sensory awareness.²⁸¹ The interrelationship of the audial and the visual of verbal prophecy and visionary experience reveal a basic truth of biblical religious experience. The contact with the

²⁷⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamar, *Truth and method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroads, 2004), 269.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ E. Eisenstein, "The Printing Press as an Agent of Change," in Paul Kybird, "Using the Bible in Adult Christian Education," *JATE* 3, no. 1 (2006): 55.

²⁸⁰ George Savran, "Seeing is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 320.

²⁸¹ Cf. Halot. *TDOT* 13, 214.

Divine is illustrated through a variety of modes of expression, all of which are “but limited approximations of the experience.”²⁸²

Most biblical texts describe a dynamic tension between seeing and hearing, the two modes of perceptions which, according to Savran, complement and complete one another.²⁸³ For example, “YHWEH is implored to incline his ear and open his eyes,” in 2 Kings 19:16. Isaiah tells Hezekiah that YHWEH has both heard his prayer and seen his tears and will therefore grant him long life. It can be deduced that seeing and hearing run parallel, with no preference one over the other as illustrated in Isaiah 11:3: “He shall not judge by what his eyes behold, not decide by what his ears perceive”; Isaiah 21:3: “I am gripped by pangs like a woman in travail too anguished to hear, too frightened to see”; and Isaiah 33:15: “He who stops his ears against listening to infamy shuts his eyes against looking at evil.”

While certain texts speak unequivocally of a primary visual experience of the divine with no verbal element attached, discrete descriptions of both modes of perception are more common.²⁸⁴ Another illustration is Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28:10-22 which begins with the visual perception of a ladder, angels, and of YHWEH, and is followed by an oracle describing YHWH’s intentions for Jacob. While hearing and seeing are described consecutively as separate actions, they are brought together in order to represent the fullness of the encounter with the divine.²⁸⁵ Finally, Paul’s letter to the Romans illustrates:

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course

²⁸² Savran, “Seeing is Believing,” 321.

²⁸³ Ibid., 322.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 323.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 324.

they did: their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (Romans 10:17).

Rothaker points out that the verse does not say that faith comes by the Word of God as many teach and preach but comes out of the things that we hear. The written testimony from God's Word can be that faith-producing word, "but this does not nullify the fact that this scripture is saying that faith comes from what we hear of that which has been produced by a spoken word from the Lord."²⁸⁶

Christian change: cultural identity and socio-linguistic factors

Weber observes that there cannot be an objective, scientific analysis of culture.²⁸⁷ In the same vein, Storey notes that cultural studies lack a single approach towards the issues it relates to and deals with.²⁸⁸ This, Storey explains, is because culture is a social science that deals primarily with realities in a given community that runs the life of the people in that context and which eventually becomes unique for them.²⁸⁹

Hall links the different realities in the lives of communities and groups to that of trajectories, that is, chosen courses. He explains that people can have various trajectories, each made in a unique context but which can be in a differing position from that of the other.²⁹⁰ This positioning towards the world is the way various communities make meanings and establish values that are based on their historical

²⁸⁶ John Rothacker, "So then faith cometh by hearing," www.johnrothacker.org/downloads/..Faith_by_hearing.pdf (accessed April 12, 2013).

²⁸⁷ Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," in *Social Theory Roots and Branches*, ed. Peter Kivisto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

²⁸⁸ John Storey, ed. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1994), viii.

²⁸⁹ Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science," 70.

²⁹⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 278.

traditions. Culture then becomes the living traditions and practices where communities express their understanding towards various patterns of their communal lives.²⁹¹ Weber seemingly endorses this view for he points out that culture analyzes the different phenomena in life in relation to the community's cultural significance that eventually creates the norms and values for the same.²⁹² These values become a way of life including ideas, attitudes, languages, norms, and organizational set ups and at the same time practices the same in artistic forms, texts, architecture and others.²⁹³ In this sense, the people of the community eventually become cultural beings, empowered with the cultural values that help each person to take a position towards the world and to make/create meanings in all aspects of life.²⁹⁴

Blount emphasizes the importance of interpreting a text not only in its historical context but also in the present day's cultural context.²⁹⁵ He stresses the vital role the language used in the reading of a text and its whole interpretation process plays, for language is one of the means by which a person can understand the world. Schussler, similarly, believes that language is an avenue where discourse is expressed, the "articulation of intelligibility" as she calls it.²⁹⁶ In this respect, language becomes an important platform for every text, and it provides the possibility for people to choose: "those who draft it and those who subsequently encounter it with the

²⁹¹ Ibid., 38.

²⁹² Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science," 70.

²⁹³ Grossberg et al., *Cultural Studies*, 5.

²⁹⁴ Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science," 73.

²⁹⁵ Blount, *Can I get a Witness*, 2.

²⁹⁶ Elizabeth Fiorenza Schussler, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1984), 29.

opportunity to decode its audible sounds and visible makers.”²⁹⁷ Words not only give meaning but also the potential to exercise that meaning. This same meaning though, Schussler explains, can be exercised differently in each and every context.²⁹⁸

This view is equally crucial in the Christian and/or theological perspectives. Jensen argues that theology should be involved in a thorough understanding of the context and pick up the issues that the community is dealing with in the particular context.²⁹⁹ It is understood that the message of Christ is the same for all languages; nevertheless, different languages do it differently.³⁰⁰ This is where Grimes asserts, “Globally, mother tongue has been crucial to impact unreached peoples and to develop disciples and churches.”³⁰¹ She explains that Christianity is the “changing” phenomenon in the person of Jesus Christ, and it is the saving transformation about which the Bible and Christian literature speak. One of the best media to interpret this “change” phenomenon, that is, a new life in Christ is through language.³⁰² Mugambi and Guy call this a “Theology of Reconstruction” and explain it thus:

The Christian Theology of change should not disparage people and communities’ culture and religious heritage. On the contrary, it should strengthen it. People and communities need to live their own “reality” in the way that they (each and every one of them) understand it.³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹⁹ Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 217.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 218.

³⁰¹ Barbara F. Grimes, “From Every Language,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 87.

³⁰² Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 227.

³⁰³ Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Michael R. Guy, *Contextual Theology across Cultures* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2009), 21, 216.

The next section will present one such community, the Telugu migrant community in the UAE, the focus of this study, which certainly has a distinct linguistic, cultural, social, and religious culture. The purpose of the presentation below is to provide a better understanding of the Telugu migrant community's demographic set up, and ethnic, educational, shared, traditional and spiritual profile, and challenges.

UAE: the Telugu migrant community

The target group in this project, as already mentioned, will be the Telugu-speaking Indian community for several reasons. First, they constitute around 65% of the South Asian migrant community in the UAE.³⁰⁴ Second, Telugu is one of the major languages among the numerous languages spoken by the South Asian community in the UAE. Third, the BSG has already provided BE programs to this ethno-linguistic group, which has an illiteracy rate of 30-40%.³⁰⁵ Fourth, in August 2012, the BSG, in cooperation and partnership with the Telugu Church in the UAE, initiated the Word-Centered Gulf Telugu Christian Conference and so far the cooperation has been very fruitful and both the Telugu Church and the BSG decided to continue the joint venture and initiate more collaborative programs in the future. All these encouraged the BSG staff and the General Secretary to assess and evaluate the impact of the Scripture message of hope on the Telugu migrant community in the UAE with the sole purpose of rendering a better service, an enhanced testimony, effective outreach tools, successful workshops, and efficient dissemination of the life-changing message of the Bible.

³⁰⁴ Caplin, "Mirage in the Desert Oasis," 29.

³⁰⁵ T. V. Thomas, *South Asian Diaspora Christianity in the Persian Gulf. Christian and Missionary Alliance and Center for Evangelism and World Mission* (Regina: Canada, 2012), 18.

Below is a brief historical overview of the Telugu people, their language, identity, and cultural and religious values. It is believed that this overview will provide the reader with some background information that will aid them in contextualizing and understanding the Telugu interviewees' perspectives and interpretations of their experiences in the UAE.

Telugu is a South Indian language that is spoken by more than 60 million people in the whole world. The people of Telugu live in the present state of Andhra Pradesh and the neighboring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It became the second large language next to Hindi after the linguistic reorganization of the Indian states in 1956.³⁰⁶ The Telugu language can be considered as one of the important safeguards of culture and identity among Telugus.³⁰⁷ Telugu is not only a language but also a way of personal and community life that is characterized by a unique culture, distinctive religion, and collective identity.³⁰⁸

The emergence of the separate Telangana movement of Andhra Pradesh was a live example of the survival of the Telugu people's language and identity. Giving the name Andhra to the Telugu region in the 20th century was the result of "the intervention of a new historical consciousness."³⁰⁹ Andhra Pradesh was formed by annexing Telangana, the eastern part of Hyderabad, with Andhra in an effort to integrate the Telugu into a single political unit. The word Andhra does not only refer to the Telugu language but also to a "historical domain of much gravity," especially

³⁰⁶ Gijssbert Oonk, ed., *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (IIAS: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 92.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 115.

³⁰⁹ Yamanda Keiko, "Origin and Historical Evolution of the Identity of Modern Telugus," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2010, 1.

after the rediscovery of some ancient history connected with the Andhra dynasty and culture and close links with Buddhism. Historical evidence shows that the Telugus were real descendants of the ancient Andhras, who had built a prosperous past and who eventually became the Telugus of the modern times. There is ample evidence that the linguistic identity of the Andhras has played an important role in the overall process.³¹⁰

Andhra Pradesh is now the largest state in South India.³¹¹ It is known to be the birthplace of several religions and sectarian movements in the region, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Jainism, and sectarian and cultic movements such as Araya Samaj, Divya Jnana Samaj and others.³¹² Even though people follow various traditions and customs, Hinduism is the predominant religion. In Andhra Pradesh 33 types of tribes reside, comprising more than 3,000,000 tribal people. They worship their own set of nature gods and goddesses and follow ancient traditions and customs. They worship Lord Shiva Goddess of Fire and Hanuman for their prosperity and safety. Islam is the second predominant religion. Luis Da Salvador, a Franciscan missionary, was the first Christian missionary to introduce Christianity in the region in the early 18th century.³¹³ Protestant Christianity also spread through the efforts of the colonial officers and Dutch and British missionaries at around the same time. Evangelical missionaries were the first to attempt to translate the Bible into Telugu.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Oonk, *Global Indian Diasporas*, 92.

³¹² Ibid., 110.

³¹³ S. Joe Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission: A Foundation of Andhra Church* (Secunderabad: Jesuit Province Society, 2004), 44.

³¹⁴ J. S. M. Hooper and J. Culshaw, *Bible Translation in India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1963), 87.

Being the 5th largest populated region of India, Andhra Pradesh is a land of dynamic ethnic and religious groups that are living in the state harmoniously for decades. Communal riots and other external elements of disruption that can adversely affect the otherwise calm structure of Andhra Pradesh's society are carefully prevented from reaching the contours of the state. The governing bodies, along with the local population are keen to erase any attempt for religious or sect-ethnic disturbances.³¹⁵

Telugu people are proud of their cultural heritage and consider the Telugu language, temples and festivals as significant to their identity.³¹⁶ The Telugu literature is rich with stories, dramas, epics and poems. It reflects the rich cultural and traditional history of the region. As people of Andhra Pradesh have a deep and intense feeling towards their language, they have expressed it through various literary artistic products. The classical dance form of Kuchipudi is native to a small town near Vijaywada. It incorporates elements of myths and the Hindu religion and is performed to Telugu music and Sanskrit chants. Tribal dances are filled with grace and rhythm. The most well-known is the dhimsa of the colourful Lambadi tribe. The Veernatyam captures the energy of an enraged Shiva, the Destroyer God in the Hindu divine trinity. Performed with vigor by the Veermusti community who believe they are his descendants, the dance expresses Shiva's rage against his wife Sati.³¹⁷

Migration is far from being a recent development for the Telugu. Throughout history the Telugu migrated for several reasons. We can see a strong migration trend

³¹⁵ www.mapsofindia.com/andhra-pradesh/people-culture-and-festival (accessed September 24, 2013).

³¹⁶ Oonk, *Global Indian Diasporas*, 98.

³¹⁷ www.mapsofindia.com/andhra-pradesh/people-culture-and-festival (accessed September 24, 2013).

during the British colonial rule, where high taxation pushed peasants to leave their lands. Also, frequent famine, and lack of irrigation facilities and employment opportunities created so many casualties and damages to the Telugu people that urged them to migrate.³¹⁸ Today, the trend continues, this time to the Gulf and in the thousands in the hope of providing their families with a better life.

It is a known fact that Indians, in general, tend to reproduce their own religion, family patterns and culture when they are abroad. However, it is a widespread phenomenon among Indian migrants to identify more with the region they come from than with India as a nation.³¹⁹ The region and locality then become more important for an Indian migrant than religion and nationality.³²⁰ Thus, Oonk observes that the Telugus in the UAE can be categorized under “Transitory Diaspora”, that is, all those who live in a host country for temporary employment while their families stay back home. The Transitory Diaspora people do not detach themselves from the motherland.³²¹ In such a context, bringing all the different migration patterns within one umbrella of “Indian Diaspora” can be a challenge.³²² Cohen notes, “Within academic Indian Diaspora, the reproduction of Indian culture in an often hostile environment and relations with the homeland” are key factors of the diaspora context.³²³ Vora argues that the different experiences, subjectivities, and forms of

³¹⁸ Oonk, *Global Indian Diasporas*, 12.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., 92.

³²² Ibid., 11.

³²³ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), 26.

belonging among and between different groups of Indians in Dubai underscore the difficulty in studying diasporas as bounded socio-cultural units.³²⁴

Similarly, engaging with the Christian message of change among the Telugu migrants can have various connotations, for it is not only bounded by the migrants' identity and nationality but also by migration to Dubai and the experiences of living there.³²⁵ Hence, the imperative and challenge of finding answers to such questions as: how do Telugu migrants read the Bible and make meaning of it, taking into consideration their language and cultural perspectives? How does the Christian message of changed lives impact the present lives of Telugu migrants and help them sustain their faith in their "hostile" Transitory Diaspora situation? How does the message of hope help them connect with their homeland and search for a better tomorrow? The answers to these compelling, thought-provoking questions will be presented in Chapter Four.

³²⁴ Neha Vora, "Producing Diasporas and Globalization: Indian Middle-Class Migrants in Dubai," *Anthropology Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 402.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 403.

CHAPTER THREE

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the overall plan for implementing the project. First, it presents a brief discussion of interpreting texts. Second, it highlights the three main goals of the study, focusing on biblical/hermeneutical, practical and socio-economic features. Then, it discusses the biblical verses and texts selected for the purposes of this research. The chapter also explains the fieldwork methodology, data collection process and tools, and characteristics of the interviewees selected for this thesis. Finally, the strategies, techniques, and key features of the evaluation of the data are presented in detail.

Reading and interpreting Bible texts

Crockett believes that Bible Engagement is a situated, contextual activity.³²⁶ He asserts that on the individual level, the aim of BE is the meditation and construction of “learned memories”, truths on which people are willing to base their lives and conduct. On a group or communal level, the aim of BE is the construction of shared meanings developed through “authentic dialogue or inter-subjectivity.”³²⁷ For Crockett BE brings God’s Word to life.³²⁸ Crockett emphasizes the processes and feels they are important. In this respect, it is important to detect the range of horizons that each and every migrant worker in the interview will develop after reading or hearing

³²⁶ Joseph V. Crockett, “Bible in the Life of the Anglican Communion: Reflections,” Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship, 2012), 5.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

the text through the three mediums. It is crucial to find not only what each migrant understood and made meaning of the texts they were exposed to but also how they link their memory of lived experiences to the text and modify the impact of the same with their experiences. It is equally important to see how the same text and message learned will help the migrant to open new “connections” in their life experiences that will/can eventually help them to endure in their diaspora context and when they go back home.

Narrating one’s life through stories and experiences (whether own or relatives’ or friends’) are important for making and mediating meaning. Stories tell something about one’s identity and shape a shared understanding.³²⁹ The project, in this context, dealt with personal stories and experiences, the stories of those who were interviewed, or their families’, or their friends’. Each and every story and experience narrated some sort of a meaning of the interviewees’ lives. The stories of each and every one of the interviewees’ are their own reality which eventually have become their own “truths” which they cherish not only in their own life but also pass on to others. As Crockett explains, “while we live by stories that narrate the meaning of our lives, we also live on seas of paradox. We read, study, listen, learn, believe, and pass on our beliefs as reality - as ‘truth’ - to others.”³³⁰ In this respect, the project helped to overview not only the present situation of the Telugu migrant workers in their UAE context but also the way they sustain their faith and share it with other fellow migrants. The latter is a live experience not only in the diaspora context that they live in but also when they go back home.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Crockett argues that there are three main salient findings in any such research: value of the Bible, process of Bible engagement, and context.³³¹ The same pattern can be applied to this project. The research, a pioneering project, dealt with and highlighted the way the Telugu migrant workers in the UAE value the Bible and how it shapes their identity and informs their purposes. The project also dealt with the process of engaging the Bible and how various mediums, printed, audio and storytelling helped and are helping migrants to understand and make meaning of biblical texts.

Crockett reminds us that in as much as BE is an interpretive enterprise, the processes used to engage the Bible may be as important as its content. Processes however, he asserts, are heterogeneous. The Telugu migrant readers and hearers in this project acquired the message by engaging with the text through three different mediums, each in their own contexts and the impact of contexts, such as, broken families, homesickness, illnesses, financial concerns, abuse, and addictions on their lives. As Crockett explains, “context is a situational variable that alters the psychological significance and social demands of particular life events. Context is a provoking agent - a mechanism - that shapes how texts are read and meanings are mediated.”³³²

In the same vein, reading a text is an interaction between what is being read, that is, the work and the reader. In fact, Flood argues, “every act of reading evokes a horizon of expectations or set or cultural, ethical and literary expectations on the part

³³¹ Ibid., 9-10.

³³² Ibid., 10.

of the readers in the historical moment.”³³³ The text that the reader is reading is not passively received rather it is actively built within the same reader’s horizon of expectations and the “relationship between reader and text is quite dissimilar to that between perceiver and objects.”³³⁴ This is equally true for both literature and sacred texts. The text is materialized and becomes a reality at the moment of its reception. In this reception, the author argues, truth of the text is constructed by the imagination of the reader or shared imagination of the community of readers which is often acted out in a liturgical setting. Husserl believes that every originally constituent process is inspired by pretensions that construct and collect the seed of what is to come and bring it to fruition.³³⁵ For Husserl these pretensions are

Expectations implied at sentence level, a structure inherent in all intentional sentence correlates. The sentence correlate or intentional correlate is that to which the sentence points and the literary object is built up by these intentional correlates, the totality of these sentence correlates constituting the portrayed world of the work.³³⁶

This means that every sentence in the same process of reading develops a horizon that becomes the base of the next sentence and further it goes on in modifying the text. The reader then develops expectations as to how indeterminacies in the text are to be concluded with some expectations being resolved and new expectations being evoked. In literary texts, Husserl argues, these expectations are often disrupted and the text reassessed and modified. Memory here undergoes a transformation and that which is remembered becomes open to new connections. These in turn influence the

³³³ Gavin D. Flood, “The Phenomenology of Scripture: Patterns of Reception and Discovery behind Scriptural Reasoning,” *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (July, 2006): 509.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phanomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins Gesammelte Werke X* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1966), 52.

³³⁶ Ibid.

expectations aroused by the individual and correlates the sequence of sentences. For the author, the act of reading consists of a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories. Flood modifies and adapts Husserl's argument by pinpointing that transformed arguments in a religious context are not only connected with the individual's life but also with the tradition and nature of intentional correlates within the text, and the latter is different in order than that of the literary text.³³⁷

Hardy describes transformation as "abduction" and explains that abduction entails the "transformation of one's life... it changes everything and enables the person to receive an excessive identity."³³⁸ Hardy's understanding of abduction, in many ways, complements the argument initiated by Husserl and later adapted by Flood to religious contexts. Hardy asserts that reading the Scripture "abductively" gives rise to a new triadic possibility: first, we recognize the true awfulness of oppression and suffering in life; secondly, we experience healing; and thirdly, we move towards caring for others.³³⁹ Similarly, Smallbones relates the Bible to transformation because for her engagement with Scripture has always resulted in transformed lives.³⁴⁰ She believes that there is no one method of engaging the Scripture. Smallbones does not undermine human effort and finds what a teacher does is necessary to how a learner responds. Nevertheless, she argues that the transforming power of the Scripture has little to do with those efforts. She believes

³³⁷ Flood, "Phenomenology of Scripture," 510.

³³⁸ Daniel W. Hardy, "The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning," *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (July, 2006): 536-537.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 547.

³⁴⁰ Jackie L. Smallbones, "Teaching Bible for Transformation," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 293.

that the way the Bible transforms people has to do with the gracious even mysterious work of the Spirit of God.

Baring stresses that Bible reading is an inspired activity that honors God and not just an academic exercise.³⁴¹ It is more a combination of mind, heart, and hands where reading is regarded highly in terms of cognition, affection, and praxis. Bible reading is a sanctifying act which leads the person to holiness; it is the proclamation of God's works manifested in Jesus and an exercise of discernment with God's people which brings joy to the reader. Baring remarks that Bible reading is an act of exploring the authoritative message of God that has a convincing power as the *raison d'être* to traditional perceptions of the clergy's authority. Bible reading should take place at a greater frequency because it challenges the person to be engaged with its content where the world of the reader meets the world of the text. Stearns argues that being a Christian or follower of Christ requires much more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God.³⁴² It entails a public and transforming relationship with the world. Stearns believes that engaging with the Scriptures goes beyond one's relationship with God. This engagement challenges and transforms the prevailing values and practices of the world into a new one which Jesus called the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom becomes a reality through the lives and deeds of His followers.

Goals and strategies of the project

Based on the above and the literature review presented in detail in Chapter Two, this project aims to assess the way migrant workers engage with the Scripture

³⁴¹ Rito V. Baring, "Understanding Student Attitudes toward Bible Reading: A Philippine Experience," *The Religious Education* 103, no. 2 (March - April 2008): 171.

³⁴² Richard Stearns, *The Hole in our Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 2-3.

message of hope by not only reading and mediating it but also by sustaining it in their diaspora context. The study is done among Telugu migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates, for reasons already explained in Chapter One. The project has three components that are elaborated through three goals. Each goal has three strategies that the research is built on. For these purposes, three Bible texts were selected especially for this research in three different formats: printed, audio, and storytelling. The research also focused on finding out how different church traditions use the different mediation tools to engage the Scripture message with their constituencies. The purpose of the latter exercise, besides being another tool to validate the findings from the interviews with the migrant workers, is to compare and contrast the data with that obtained from the interviews with the Telugu interviewees. Finally, the project attempts to find out the way the Telugu migrant workers use the Scripture message of hope to tackle their everyday social, economic, religious, and family challenges in their diaspora context.

The three goals and strategies are devised in such a way to tackle and cover the Biblical Hermeneutical, practical, and socio-economic aspects of the project, and they are:

Goal 1 (Biblical Hermeneutical): To increase and measure the Telugu migrant awareness of hope from its present expression in their lives to one defined by Find, Save and Lead.

Biblical verse: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,” 2 Timothy 3:16.

- Strategy 1: Discovering plural meanings of hope by the Telugu migrant workers.

- Strategy 2: Interact with the three Bible stories to explore dimensions of Christian hope.
- Strategy 3: Comparing and contrasting and evaluating their original views of hope with Biblical aspects of hope.

Goal 2 (practical): To measure the effectiveness of different forms of Bible mediation by making similarities and differences in the Telugu use of printed, audio, and storytelling formats.

Biblical verse: “For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then, it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see?” Romans 8: 24.

- Strategy 1: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 1: Read, reflect and document understandings of the biblical narrative (read).
- Strategy 2: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 2: listen, reflect and document understandings of the biblical narrative (heard).
- Strategy 3: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 3: listen, reflect and document understandings of the Biblical narrative (storytelling).

Goal 3 (socio-economic): To increase in measureable ways the application of Christian hope in Telugu migrant workers’ current life experiences.

Biblical verse: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint,” Isaiah 40:31.

- Strategy 1: To identify and describe life experiences in need of Christian hope.

- Strategy 2: To describe and act out situations in which hope is needed and applied.
- Strategy 3: To discuss the views, feelings, and thoughts about that activity and what they want to hold on to use in other situations.

The Biblical verses and texts used in the project

Christian Theology is based on the reality that God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only son (Jesus finds), so that everyone who has faith (Jesus saves) in him will have eternal life and never die (Jesus leads) John 3:16. This project dealt with this reality of the Christian faith and focused on three verses: 2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 8:24, and Isaiah 40:31; and three biblical texts: Luke 13:10-17 Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath (Jesus finds), Luke 8:40-48 the story of the sick woman (Jesus heals/saves), and Matthew 15:21-28 a woman's faith (Jesus leads). These texts were chosen to investigate the way Telugu migrant workers react to the basics of Christian faith as illustrated in the hope the Bible provides in the reality that Jesus finds, saves, and leads a person, in this case the migrant. Below is a brief presentation of these verses and texts to shed light on the gist of each selected portion.

The Biblical verse chosen from Paul's second letter to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living," 3:16, is an appropriate one that will help accomplish Goal 1, the Biblical Hermeneutical component. Barclay argues that the Scriptures opened for men and women the way to God.³⁴³ The same Scripture is used for teaching, and the fact is that the Church cannot function without the Gospels. Barclay emphasizes that Christianity is not founded on a printed book but on a living

³⁴³ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 200.

person and we get a firsthand account of that person and of his teaching in the New Testament. The Scripture reproves and is valuable for finding fault where a people are convinced of the errors of their way and are pointed to the right path. Barclay is convinced that “all theories, theologies, ethics are to be tested against the Bible. If they contradict the teaching of the Bible, they are to be refused.”³⁴⁴ The study of the Scriptures trains one for righteousness. Barclay argues that a person must study the Scriptures to make himself/herself useful to God and to the community. He asserts that no one is saved unless he/she is on fire to save his/her fellow people.

Matthew Henry writes that “the excellency” of the Scripture is in the reality that it is given by the inspiration of God.³⁴⁵ The Greek literary meaning of inspiration is “God-breathed”, that is, the Scripture is God’s Word and a divine revelation and thus we may rely on it as infallibly true.³⁴⁶ Henry explains that God’s spirit that breathed reason into us also breathes revelation among us.³⁴⁷ Schneiders confirms the latter and writes that revelation is by no means restricted to the Bible.³⁴⁸ It is the sinful nature of humankind that makes it difficult for them to be receptive to the “divine self-gift.” Schneiders asserts that only in Jesus of Nazareth do we see an entire human existence so fully actualized by the divine self-gift that we can affirm that he is the Word of God incarnate. Thus Jesus in his person, work, and paschal mystery is seen as the ultimate divine revelation. She insists that the Bible does not only provide a record of past “revelational” experiences but also the privileged

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 201.

³⁴⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, www.biblegateway.com (accessed September 24, 2013).

³⁴⁶ Daniel King, “Making the Man of God Complete,” www.bible.com/ef/expository (accessed September 24, 2013).

³⁴⁷ Henry, *Commentary*.

³⁴⁸ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Minnesota, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 45-46.

possibility of revelation in the present. Scripture then, according to her, becomes the medium of this divine self-gift for all who approach it in faith, which is the essence of the spiritual preparation of the believer that opens their heart to the possibility of a life filled with hope.

The Bible verse chosen from Romans, “For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then, it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see,” 8:24, is an appropriate one that will help accomplish Goal 2, the practical component. Henry argues that believers can reach a state of safety but their “comfort consists rather in hope than in enjoyment. From this hope they cannot be turned by the vain expectation of finding satisfaction in the things of time and sense.”³⁴⁹ Henry believes that no matter how long and how tough life is for a person it is important to be patient because “He that shall come, will come, though he seems to be tarry.”³⁵⁰ Clark, on the other hand, argues that the human being is supported and feels comfortable because he/she has the expectation to receive from God all the goods that they need and in the different circumstances of their lives.³⁵¹ They will also be raised from corruption and death at the general resurrection. Hope signifies the expectation of the good, so it is assumed that the object is not seen and hence not enjoyed. The hope that is seen, that is enjoyed, is no longer hope, it is fruition; a person cannot hope for that which he has in his possession.

The Bible verse chosen from Isaiah, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint,” 40:13, is an appropriate one that will help

³⁴⁹ Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1952.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

accomplish Goal 3, the socio-economic component. As the historical context of this verse is the hope in the re-establishment of the nation of Israel, this verse was chosen to signify hope in the betterment of one's socio-economic state, in this case the migrants' socio-economic wellbeing in the Gulf. Rightly, Barnes and Murphy explain hope (or wait) in the context of hoping (waiting) for the Lord's (YHWH) help to trust in Him, to put hope and confidence in Him.³⁵² As for renewing strength, they explain it in the context of change, revival, and cause to flourish again. Their explanation of the "wings of the eagle" notes that the eagle rises on the most vigorous wings of any bird and ascends further toward the sun. Barnes and Murphy link this figure to the reality that God's hope "denotes strength and vigor of purpose; strong and manly piety; an elevation above the world; communion with God, and nearness to his throne."³⁵³

Besides the above-mentioned three verses used to guide the three Goals of this project, three texts were chosen and given/presented to the interviewees, ahead of the individual interviews, in three different formats (printed, audio, and storytelling) to examine the way Telugu migrant workers engage with the message of hope found in the Jesus who finds, saves, and leads.

The first text, Luke 13:10-17, focuses on the fact that Jesus finds. This is the story of a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years. Thomas describes this woman as "one who so often suffers - eighteen years - whatever her age, it is a great portion of her life."³⁵⁴ He explains that the woman had a spirit of infirmity, indicating supernatural power behind physical trouble but not that she had

³⁵² Albert Barnes and James Murphy, *Barnes Notes on the Old and New Testament. Isaiah* vols. 1 and 2 (London: Blackie and Son, 1851).

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1984), 222.

been born with malformation or deformity. The woman was “bowed together - bent double.”³⁵⁵ In spite of her difficulties and situation, Jesus pitied her, was drawn to her needs, saw her, and called her to him. When Jesus placed his hands on her, she stood up straight and praised God.

The second text, Luke 8:40-48, focuses on the fact that Jesus heals/saves. This is the story of a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. No medicine ever helped her. In spite of the large crowd around Jesus, she managed to touch Jesus. Jesus felt the touch and wanted to see who the person was. The woman made herself known in front of the huge crowd, and Jesus said to her, “You are now well because of your faith” (Mark 8:48). Henry encourages the reader not to complain of the crowd as long as one does what is good; otherwise, every wise person will keep themselves out of it as much as they can. He insists that “many a poor soul is healed, and helped and saved by Christ that is hidden in a crowd and nobody notices it.”³⁵⁶

The third text, Matthew 15:21-28, focuses on the fact that Jesus leads. This is the story of a Canaanite woman who asked Jesus to help heal her demon-possessed daughter. Even though the woman was a stranger to the people of Israel, she insisted and persevered so hard so that Jesus would heal her daughter. Jesus, seeing the faith of the woman, said, “You really have a lot of faith, and you will be given what you want,”³⁵⁷ and the daughter was healed. Henry offers an interesting explanation and writes: “the dark corners of the country, the most remote, shall share Christ’s influences; afterwards the ends of the earth shall see his salvation.”³⁵⁸ Henry links this

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

³⁵⁶ Henry *Concise Commentary*, 952.

³⁵⁷ *Good News Bible*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1992). Matthew 15:28.

³⁵⁸ Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 952.

argument to the story of the woman in the text whose distress and family problems brought her to Christ. Even though a need might drive a person to Christ, the same person will never be driven away from Him. Henry concludes by saying, “Of all graces, faith honors Christ most; therefore, of all graces Christ honors faith most. He cured her daughter. He spake, and it was done.”³⁵⁹

Main data collection tool: Individual interviews

This study can be described as a qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on an activity that is situated and that locates the observer in the world.³⁶⁰ It creates practices and interpretation tools that help to visualize the world better. Qualitative research helps in building a pattern to interpret what is going on in the world by studying the events that are taking place in their original context and the meanings that people in that context bring to it.³⁶¹ Qualitative research is multi-method in its focus. The multi-method tool helps to obtain an in-depth understanding of the case in question. Denzin and Lincoln argue that objective reality can never be captured, and that we know a thing only through its representations. The main method of collecting data I chose for this project is semi-structured, open-ended personal interviews. Below is a detailed presentation of this tool and the interviews used in this study.

Individual interviews

Researchers believe that personal interviewing is the most commonly used tool in qualitative research. Rapley explains that research interviews are seen

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 1.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

alongside various forms of interviews like news, talk shows, and documentaries and which “pervade and produce our contemporary cultural experiences and knowledge of authentic personal, private and selves.”³⁶² Atkinson and Silverman point out that interviewing is currently the central medium through which today social sciences engage the many issues they are confronted with.³⁶³

Crockett calls individual interviews “participatory research” which brings change “to the situation in addition to understanding and explaining the situation and interaction of people in the setting.”³⁶⁴ For him, participatory research approach invites those being studied to join investigators in generating different or new understanding and to make use of those insights to participants’ benefits. The interviews with the Telugu migrant workers and the leadership of some of the different churches in the UAE helped the BSG to gather an understanding of the use of the different mediation tools and impact of the Bible message of hope on the daily lives of the Telugu community.

Holstein and Gubrium indicate that an individual interview is both “simple and evident.”³⁶⁵ Rapley asserts that face-to-face interviewing enables a special insight into subjectivity, voice, and lived experience.³⁶⁶ Darlington and Scott highlight the fact that there is an implicit or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding

³⁶² Tim Rapley, “Interviews,” in *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds. Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber Gubrium, and David Silverman (London: Sage, 2004), 15.

³⁶³ Paul Atkinson and David Silverman, “Kundera’s *immortality*: the interview society and the invention of the self,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1997): 304.

³⁶⁴ Crockett. “Bible in the Life of the Anglican Communion,” 3.

³⁶⁵ James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium, “Active interviewing,” in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. David Silverman (London: Sage, 1997), 113.

³⁶⁶ Rapley, “Interviews,” 16.

that is not available in other forms of research, and that in case of any misunderstanding it can be checked and corrected on the spot.³⁶⁷

Holstein and Gubrium argue that respondents are “not so much repositories of knowledge-treasures of information awaiting excavation, so to speak, as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers.”³⁶⁸ In this respect, interviewing the Telugu migrant workers helped me find out how each and every one of them thinks and feels about the issues discussed and the way they see their experiences, which were not going to be accessible through other methods such as observation.³⁶⁹ At the same time, because interviewer and interviewee jointly construct knowledge, I was very careful not to influence the interviewees’ responses, even when they were sharing some of their difficult, emotional life experiences. The fact that the interviewees recounted their thoughts first to the translator, Babu Ganta, a Telugu himself and a member of the Site Team, and then the latter translated their words to the researcher in English, helped minimize the researcher’s role as an authority figure and any influence he might have had as the General Secretary of the BSG.

Thompson stresses that the interviewer should wherever possible avoid interrupting a story: “If you stop a story because you think it is irrelevant, you will cut off not just that one but a whole series of subsequent offers of information which will be relevant.”³⁷⁰ On the same note, Rapley argues that interviewers do not need to

³⁶⁷ Yvonne Darlington and Dorothy Scott, *Qualitative Research in Practice: Stories From the Field* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 35.

³⁶⁸ Holstein and Gubrium, “Active interviewing,” 114.

³⁶⁹ S. J. Taylor and R. Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Method*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1998), 56.

³⁷⁰ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 172.

worry very much whether their questions are too leading or not emphatic enough. He suggests that the interviewer just get on with their interviews with the specific person and later analyze “how your interaction produced that trajectory of talk, how specific versions of reality are co-constructed, how specific identities, discourses and narratives are produced.”³⁷¹

One of the main tasks in any research process is selecting a representative group for the research and interviews. Researchers agree that the successful fulfillment of this phase of the research is the basis for the credibility, objectivity, and reliability of the data. Rubin and Rubin, for instance, emphasize four important points in selecting or finding interviewees: initially finding knowledgeable informants, getting a range of views, testing emerging themes with new interviewees, and choosing interviewees to extend results.³⁷² They argue that these are important “ideals”, as it can serve a base to implement a new program and practice. They also find it important to find views of different perspectives on the same issue, as the few interviewees in the research can produce different positions that can be essential in modifying theories in the overall process.³⁷³ They explain that recruiting or finding interviewees can usually take place through friends, friends of friends, and friends’ families. Therefore, a sample was created for this project in line with what Darlington and Scott suggest and one that was felt, in consultation with the Site Team and the thesis supervisor, would satisfy the needs of this project and provide data and analyses that can cover various ranges of perspectives on the topic.³⁷⁴ Age, sex, and education

³⁷¹ Rapley, “Interviews,” 15.

³⁷² Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 110.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Darlington and Scott, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 9.

were some of the main criteria I believed were crucial to obtain relevant information. And as all the Telugu interviewees for this study were migrant workers, it was also important to locate volunteer interviewees who could have time for a personal interview during the time I was in the UAE. It is believed that these measurements helped produce a critical sample that would help enhance the credibility, objectivity, and reliability of the data obtained from the research.

An interpretive analysis is the final task of the whole work, as it provides “a detailed, contextual and multilayered interpretation which is unlikely to simplify or caricature developmental processes.”³⁷⁵ The need to interpret what is happening, why it is happening, and what can be done is what essentially coordinates all the chapters of this project.

It becomes crucial, not to say challenging, to clarify the dilemma between the researcher as an investigator on the one hand and as the BSG General Secretary on the other. All precautions were taken, as explained above, to provide a relaxed atmosphere for the interviewees in order to obtain objective, scientific data. I envisage the chance to do this research not as a duty but as a responsibility to press hard and do more and better in transmitting the Biblical message of hope. The fieldwork principles and this analysis reflect the empowerment framework that “responds to the social conditions of the present-day field situations and is about research ON, FOR, and WITH the people” (capitals in the original quotation).³⁷⁶

Individual interviews in the study

³⁷⁵ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2002), 175.

³⁷⁶ Colette Grinevald Craig, “Language Contact and Language Degeneration,” in *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Florian Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 269.

The first step in the implementation of the research was the exposure of eighteen Telugu interviewees to the Scripture texts. Ten days before the individual interviews were scheduled, Babu Ganta distributed the three chosen biblical texts to six literate interviewees in printed format, to six illiterate interviewees in audio format, and to six literate and illiterate interviewees in the storytelling format. The interviewees were given the texts and asked to read, listen, and watch without any explanation, comment, or analysis offered by the Site Team member. The interviewees were given ten days to reflect on the texts, understand, and make meaning of them.

Before each interview, it was made sure that the interviewee felt comfortable. Snacks and refreshments were served before the interviews. The questions were asked only when the interviewee felt at ease. Moreover, to enable people to tell their stories rapport needed to be built.³⁷⁷ In this respect, prior to each session, I introduced myself, emphasized why the research was being done, took their permission to take notes and made sure to each and every interviewer that their names will be kept confidential.³⁷⁸ I also made it clear to each interviewee their right to terminate the interview at any time, as the whole research was being done on a voluntary basis.³⁷⁹ All the interviewees, without exception, were highly motivated and interested and nobody opted out. Not only that, some of them thanked the team for having them take part in the research.

The questions were prepared in English. The interviews with the migrant workers and church leaders were done the week of March 11-15, 2013, in Dubai,

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Darlington, and Scott, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 9.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

UAE. I conducted all the interviews myself. The interviews with the church leaders, except the one with the Coptic Father (done in Arabic), were done in English. In the case of the Telugu pastor and the migrant workers, Babu Ganta asked the interview questions in Telugu and translated their answers from Telugu into English. This was so because neither the Telugu pastor nor any of the migrant workers speak English.

On an average, each interview lasted around sixty minutes. As Hermanowicz indicates, researchers agree that the “optimum” length for a qualitative research interview should not be more than ninety minutes.³⁸⁰ The interviews took place in a relatively relaxed atmosphere and setting. I took notes for each question, as I believe that taking notes is better than using a tape recorder. Also, the interviewees felt less intimidated and more open to share than if there was a tape recorder in the room. Taking notes helped me to understand better the interviewees’ answers to the questions.³⁸¹ Rightly, the researcher’s notes are considered the classic medium to document data in a qualitative research.³⁸² In this respect, “why” questions seemed interrogatory and could lead to a dead end, but “what” and “how” questions seemed less intrusive and tended to yield explanations.³⁸³ Also, the interviewees managed, without interruptions, to develop their thoughts in the sequence of the questions asked. The interviewees were encouraged to share their thoughts with personal testimonies and stories or their friends’ stories. The questions in all the interviews were asked in the same order. Before each interview, the interviewees were asked to

³⁸⁰ Joseph C. Hermanowicz, “The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed,” *Qualitative Sociology* 45 (2002): 479.

³⁸¹ David Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 1997), 85.

³⁸² John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984), 170.

³⁸³ Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 58.

provide some demographic information on sex, age, nationality, education, occupation, marital status, number of children, family location, last seen family, denomination, languages spoken, and years in the UAE. A detailed table of the characteristics of the Telugu interviewees who took part in this research can be found in Appendix F.

It was deemed crucial to also interview church leaders in order to validate the findings from the interviews with the migrants and to investigate the way different churches in the UAE use the different BE tools the BSG provides them with. Before each interview, some demographic questions were asked to the pastors, such as denomination, year the church was established in the UAE, the pastor's nationality, the ethnic composition of the church, and the language of worship. Appendix G provides a detailed profile of these different churches whose leaders were interviewed for this study.

The main goal of the interviews was to assess the way Telugu migrant workers engage with the Scriptures, especially with the message of hope, a much-needed message the BSG ascertained over twenty years of operation in the Gulf, in the hostile, abusive context in which they live. A second goal was to evaluate the view of church leaders on the use and impact of BE tools on their congregations. For these purposes, three different sets of questions were prepared. The questions devised for both groups of interviewees will be presented in detail in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

This chapter deals with the questions that the project director prepared for the project. It highlights their composition and appropriateness to gather relevant, sufficient data. The chapter sheds light on the three sets of questions behind this research project. Also, the chapter underlines the nature of these questions which were composed having in mind the main goals of this project: to assess the way Telugu migrant workers engage with the Scriptures, especially with the message of hope, and to evaluate the views of church leaders on the use and impact of BE tools on their congregations. The questions devised for the interviewees will be presented in detail in this chapter.

The composition of the research questions

Elliot argues that qualitative researchers agree that questions formulated for a certain project or research should use more everyday language rather than sociological ones.³⁸⁴ Chase believes that simple questions tend to relate more to life experiences while sociological questions “invite reports. They do not invite the other to take responsibility for the import of her response because the weight of the questions lies in the sociological ideas.”³⁸⁵ On the same note, Holloway and Jefferson believe that even though such questions used everyday language and open-ended

³⁸⁴ Jane Elliot, *Using Narrative in Social Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2005), 29.

³⁸⁵ S. E. Chase, “Taking narrative seriously: consequences for method and theory in interview studies,” in *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*, vol. 3, eds. R. Josselson and A. Lieblich (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 26.

questions for their research, they did not give the detailed narrative accounts they were expecting.³⁸⁶ Elliot asserts that a rigid structure of an interview with only a standardized set of questions would make it difficult for the interviewees to share their life stories and experiences. Respondents are likely to find it easier to talk about specific times and situations rather than being asked about a wide time frame.³⁸⁷

Stringer argues that a major problem in interviews has to do with the questions because questions can be easily “tainted” with the researcher’s perception, perspectives, interests, and agendas.³⁸⁸ Experienced researchers confront such major issues and concerns and try to find the solutions through their professional stock of knowledge. Stringer focuses first on the interviewees and the importance of getting his/her assessment of the issue and in his/her own terms. The researchers’ perspectives may follow in the research process at a later stage. To avoid researcher influence, Stringer proposes that researchers meticulously focus on the composition of the questionnaires during the research process. He indicates that interviewees can react negatively if the questions have implied judgment or criticism embedded into them.³⁸⁹

Spradley provides a mechanism for a relatively neutral and non-leading questions that minimize the extent to which participants’ perceptions will be governed by language and concepts inadvertently imposed by researchers.³⁹⁰ The author suggests three kinds of questions: first, Grand Tour questions which are rather global

³⁸⁶W. Holloway and T. Jefferson, *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method* (London: Sage, 2000), 34.

³⁸⁷ Elliot, *Using Narrative*, 31.

³⁸⁸ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 70.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ J. P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1997), 70.

to help the interviewees to share his/her own situation in his/her own terms; second, Typical questions which help the interviewees to respond to the way events usually occur; and third, Specific questions which focus on specific events.

Booth et al. encourage researchers not to ask “big” questions which are known to all. They feel that some problems are already “in the air” and known to all. They suggest asking questions that “intrigue” the researcher and add: “A mental itch that only one researcher feels the need to scratch.”³⁹¹ They believe that the aim of the question asked should not only have an answer but also encourage the researcher to pose and solve a problem that others feel is worth solving.³⁹² Readers of a research report not only look for information but also for an answer that is worth taking seriously. Thus researchers should shy away from asking standard journalistic questions: who, what, when, and where and instead focus on how and why. Such questions are fourfold and analytical with regard to the topic: composition, history, categorization and values. Booth et al. explain that the composition of the questions for a research depends on the nature/context of the research. They make a distinction between pure and applied research. The former is related to the interest of scholars in a community of researchers, and the latter provides solutions to problems that can have practical consequences.³⁹³ Based on the goals of this project, it is safe to say that the present research is practice-oriented.

Aware of these different stances and experiences and taking into consideration that most of the interviewees were semi-literate and illiterate Telugu migrant workers, this project worked carefully to prepare research questions. For these reasons, the

³⁹¹ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 40.

³⁹² Ibid., 41.

³⁹³ Ibid., 64.

questions were easy to understand and at the same time encouraged the interviewees to share personal stories and experiences. Straight-forward, simple questions made the interviewees more relaxed and at the same time enabled them to take an active role in the research process. It helped them not only to understand the questions but also to share their experiences and thoughts in the way they understood the questions. As the questions were rather short, easy, and neither rigid nor standardized, they helped the interviewees to tell stories related to the issue. The experiences they shared were more linked to a specific time frame in their life rather than being on a “wide time frame” as Elliot referred to above. Taking these suggestions into consideration, the principal researcher prepared the different sets of questions for this research, and in fact they helped generate relevant, significant data. The latter will be analyzed in detail in Chapter Five.

As most of the interviewees did not speak English and the principal researcher did not speak Telugu, it was necessary to depend on translation/interpreting to communicate. The researcher is aware that a translation/interpreting environment adds another variable to this project but one that could not be avoided due to circumstances beyond his control, namely the differences in languages between the researcher and the target group. The researcher is also aware that meaning may get lost during the translation process, as researchers assert;³⁹⁴ however, as explained in the previous and present chapters, the researcher, taking heed of the challenges, took

³⁹⁴ Fenna van Nes, Tineke Abma, Hans Jonsson, and Dorly Deeg, “Language Differences in Qualitative Research: Is Meaning Lost in Translation?” *European Journal of Ageing* 7, no. 4 (Dec 2010): 313.

every precaution to minimize the inevitable loss of data and is confident that enough reliable content was present at the end.³⁹⁵

The questions for the project

The project had three main goals:

1. How do the Telugu migrant laborers in the UAE read, listen (audio, storytelling) and understand the Christian message of hope (as illustrated in the texts that Jesus finds, saves and leads), in relation to hope within their own inventory of cultural, familial, institutional life experiences in general, through their ethnic language and culture and in their Diaspora context? (Biblical hermeneutical)
2. How do Telugu migrants mediate the meaning of the Biblical texts of Christian hope through the printed, audio and storytelling formats and how does it help them in their challenges? (practical methodology)
3. How can Biblical faith help migrants to endure their present and future socio-economic pressures in the UAE and when they return home? (socio-economic: change nurtured and sustained)

To gather information that would help meet these three main objectives of the project, a set of questions was prepared for each goal. The set of questions for the first goal, “Questions on making meaning of the Scriptures”, included nine questions on the preferred language of the interviewee for reading or listening to the Scriptures, understanding hope and Christian hope, and understanding the three texts that they were exposed to. The second set, “Questions on mediating the Scriptures”, had five

³⁹⁵ Allison Squires, “Methodological Challenges in Cross-Cultural Qualitative Research: A Research Review,” *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 46, no. 2 (Feb 2009): 277.

questions that encouraged interviewees to share their personal stories and experiences. The third set, “Questions on nurturing the Scriptures”, had four questions on how the Christian message of hope nurtures them, how it helps them to face their daily challenges, and how it may continue to sustain their faith when they go back home. The same questions were asked to the three different groups of interviewees, that is, those who read the texts (printed) or listened (audio) or watched and heard (storytelling) by simply exchanging, for example, “read” with “listen”, and so on.

The three sets are:

D) Questions on making meaning of the Scriptures

1. Do you read the Bible? If yes, how often?
2. How many times did you read the four texts from the Bible that talk about hope?
3. Do you prefer to read the Bible in your mother language or it doesn't matter? Why?
4. Do you find it easy to understand a text in Telugu? If not, what do you do to grasp the meaning of the text?
5. How do you understand the main concepts of the four texts: that Jesus seeks, saves, and leads us (has authority on our lives)?
6. Could you relate the text to your culture and values?
7. Did you find the meaning of the text applicable to real life situations?

8. You read the three texts in Telugu. How did you make meaning of it? Did you discuss it with your church leaders, share it with a friend or think about it on your own?
9. How does storytelling function in your home culture? Do you tell stories? When, How, Why. Does your own experience with storytelling help you understand Jesus as a story teller?

II) Questions on mediating the Scriptures

1. How often do you read the Bible? Do you think it makes an impact on the way you look at life? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?
2. Did you find yourself in the three texts that you read? Could you see that Jesus has found you? Saved you? Leads you? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?
3. Can you think of a time when someone told you a story and it made a difference in your life?
4. Do you think your knowledge of the Scriptures through reading helped you to mediate on the Scripture message of hope? If yes, can you share with me some examples where the story you read made you think of a particular situation you were in or helped you face a particular need or a problem?
5. When you read the three texts, did they help you engage with the message of hope? If yes, can you share with me some examples where the story you read made you think of a particular situation where it helped you face a particular need or a problem?

III) Questions on nurturing the Scriptures

1. In what ways does the message of hope help you a problem? Can you think of a time when the Scriptures made a difference in your life?
2. How does the message of hope offered by the Scriptures help you? In what circumstances? Can you explain?
3. Now that you have read the texts, made meaning and tried to locate yourself into it, how do you define and understand Christian/Biblical hope in your life?
4. Do you think the message of hope and a new life with Christ will nurture you when you go back to your home country or any other country where you might find work? How?

To evaluate the view of church leaders on the use and impact of BE tools on their congregations, a different set of questions was prepared entitled, “Questions on the churches participating in the survey.” It included ten questions on the impact of the BE tools on their congregations. Below are the questions:

1. Can you briefly talk about the ministries your church runs?
2. Based on your experiences, what are some of the challenges and concerns the migrants coming to your church face? Can you provide examples?
3. What format of the Scriptures is used the most in your church – Bible, AV or Storytelling? Why do you think that is so?
4. Which format do you find the migrants are interested in the most? Why?
5. How do you help the migrants to understand and mediate on the Scripture message?

6. Which format do you think has the most impact on the migrants? Why? What are the reasons? Can you be specific?
7. Can you share with us some testimonies about how migrants were empowered by the message of hope and new life in Christ?
8. Can you share some stories about the way migrants were able to face their daily concerns and challenges after being exposed to the message of the Scriptures?
9. Probably previous migrant members of your congregation still keep in touch with you and tell you about some life-changing, spiritual experiences they have had when they left the UAE to go back home or to other places. Can you share with me some stories or testimonies to this effect?
10. In what other ways do you think the BSG can help your church in your present and future programs designed especially for migrants?

This chapter presented the questionnaires that were used in this project. The next chapter will analyze the data these questions generated. It is imperative that the Bible Society and the churches in the Gulf press harder in developing more projects to engage the Scripture message of hope among its millions of multi-lingual, -ethnic, and -racial communities. Indeed, the researcher agrees with Crockett who believes that making use of the Bible - God's Word - to inform the identity and to shape the common purpose and ministry of the church "is a vital concern for its health and destiny with God as communities of faith."³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ Joseph V. Crockett. "Bible in the Life of the Anglican Communion: Reflections." Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship, 2012, 11-12.

CHAPTER FIVE EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter presents the evaluation of the research data according to the strategies developed in the three goals. The first part of the chapter unpacks goal one by discussing the way the Telugu interviewees made meaning of the three Scripture texts through reading, listening, and storytelling. This part highlights their understanding and experiences of hope in general and Christian hope in particular.

The second part focuses on goal two. This section presents first the way the Telugu workers mediated the three Scripture texts in the different formats; second, the way six ethnically and linguistically different churches use BE tools and assess their impact on their migrant congregations; and third, a comparison between the way the Telugu interviewees and six other congregations mediate the message of hope.

The third and final part of the evaluation includes a discussion of the data generated from goal three. This section deals with the interviewees' perspectives on the way the Scriptures nurture their and fellow migrants' lives in the diaspora and when they go back home to India, as all have to eventually.

The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity; therefore, their contributions are identified by a code which will include their age, sex, mediation tool (P for printed, A for audio, ST for storytelling), and number. The contribution, for example, of a 36-year-old male who used the printed version of the Scriptures and was interviewee number 6 is designated as 36MP6, and so on. The clergy who were interviewed are identified by their initials and church denomination.

Goal 1 (Biblical Hermeneutical): To increase and measure the Telugu migrant awareness of hope from its present expression in their lives to one defined by Find, Save, and Lead

Before delving into the main questions of goal 1, it was deemed necessary to inquire about the interviewees' habits and preferences when it comes to engaging with the Bible, that is, how often and in what language they engage with the Scriptures. Below is a brief presentation of the relevant data.

It was very interesting to find out how the Telugu migrant workers responded to the use of the Bible in different formats in their everyday life. The responses showed how crucial the role of the Scripture is in their everyday life. Reading/hearing the Scripture has been and still is a regular routine in their life. All six interviewees in the printed section said that they read the Bible regularly every day. Two, 4MP2 and 32MP3 said that they read it twice a day. 36MP6 said he reads it "six times a day." This is not unusual. Reading the Bible every day helps the migrants navigate in their life journey and enter into a partnership by dialoguing with it, as Brueggemann indicates, "the Bible is not an object of study but a partner with whom we may engage in dialogue."³⁹⁷

50MA7 said,

I listen to the DVD provided by the Bible Society whenever I have any time. My engagement with the Scripture is through prayer meetings where I listen to the sermons. I am married with 4 children but my family is in India. I try hard to live a clean life, not even watching Bollywood movies.

The latter experience is well defined by Frederick. He explains spirituality as the way "an individual lives and practices transcends beliefs at its most basic and

³⁹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003), 123.

generic form.”³⁹⁸ Cunningham and Egan show that Christian spirituality must root itself in the Word of God, but in the Word of God there is no single coherent spirituality but rather many spiritualities.³⁹⁹

50FA8 is used to listening to sermons on her mega voice player (MVP) provided by the BSG. “I use it every day,” she said. 55FA9 is functionally illiterate. She knows the alphabet, but it is very hard for her to read. She prefers to listen to audio/CD cassettes. She said, “I listen to the Scripture message every morning.” 43FA10 is again functionally illiterate, and she prefers the audio to the printed book. She enjoys and benefits more when someone explains the Word of God to her. 32MA11 uses the audio texts but likes someone to explain to him the Scripture Message.

37MA12 is a construction worker. He and his wife are the only converts into Christianity while the rest of the family adheres to Hinduism, a common trait among the Telugus since Hinduism, besides Islam, is the traditional religion of the Telugu people. He listens to the MVP provided by the BSG. He used to take the MVP with him to the construction site and listen to it while working; however, lately, he was prohibited from using it at the site for safety reasons. “I was told that I could lose control while focusing on listening to the text and could fall down while working on higher levels. I had to give it up, but I listen to it at other times.” In fact, all six interviewees in the audio group indicated that they listened to the Bible only in Telugu because “Telugu is the only language that makes it easy for me to understand the text,” was their common response.

³⁹⁸ Thomas V. Frederick, “Discipleship and Spirituality from a Christian Perspective,” *Pastoral Psycho* 56 (2008): 553.

³⁹⁹ Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1996), 15.

50FST13 is of Hindu background. She is semi-literate. Besides Telugu, she can speak some Hindi and English. She prefers storytelling to reading because “it is more interesting. I love stories. They are lively, and I can remember them and tell them to others.” 51FST14 is literate, yet she prefers storytelling. She said, “It triggers my imagination and helps me to see the story in my mind’s eye.” 53FST15 is semi-literate and prefers storytelling because “they are more interesting. Jesus himself used stories and that is why people understood his message. This is also the reason why we like it, too.”

32MST16 is of Hindu background. He is semi-literate and prefers storytelling. He said, “It is interesting, easy, and there are no difficult words.” 32MST16 compared the printed Bible and storytelling and said, “The printed book has difficult words whereas storytelling is much easier to understand.” 32MST16 also made a comparison between listening to a sermon and storytelling. He said, “Sermons can be long and difficult to follow; whereas, stories are short and easy to listen to. I have experienced both long sermons where people showed no interest and stories that they were totally immersed in.” Rightly, Palmer writes that he finds it hard to name his beliefs using traditional Christian language because that vocabulary has been taken hostage by theological terrorists and tortured beyond recognition.⁴⁰⁰ As if agreeing with Palmer, Dewey argues that storytelling has moved him in his own faith journey toward the edge, and there ironically he believes he found the center.⁴⁰¹ Dewey, similar to the interviewees’ experiences, pinpoints some of the reasons as to why storytelling is more interesting than other mediums: “storytelling is more lively,

⁴⁰⁰ Parker Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of the Contradictions in the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xxi.

⁴⁰¹ Dennis Dewey, “Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation,” www.DennisDewey.org (2013), 9.

memorable, embodied, engaging and much more effective. It is about learning in heart which captures the person internally.”⁴⁰²

25MST17 is semi-literate but prefers that someone tell him the story rather than him reading the Bible alone:

A story helps me to picture a situation. It is like a movie in front of me, and that is why it becomes more interesting. Storytelling makes me think because of the questions that are raised at the end. It also helps me to easily share it with others.

42MST18 is semi-literate and finds reading “boring and dull.” His experience with storytelling has been great: “I learn a lesson when someone tells me a story.

Every time I hear a story from the Bible it captivates my whole attention.”

All six interviewees in the printed section said that they preferred to read the Bible in Telugu. It should also be noted that the six interviewees spoke and read primarily Telugu, their mother language. Besides Telugu they could speak Hindi fairly and very little Arabic and English. For example, 33FP1 said, “Telugu is my mother tongue, and I understand it easily.” 43MP2 reported, “I am satisfied only when I read the Bible in Telugu.” The storytelling interviewees also indicated that they like to listen to a story in their mother language. In fact, Telugus come from a culture that is still strongly oral, that is, where storytelling is a routine of life. Apart from the fact that BSG’s storytelling BE format is an excellent tool to reach the illiterate, the Telugus’ culture of an oral tradition makes more accessible and acceptable. Five of the six interviewees in the storytelling group were semi-literate and one was literate. Even then, they all indicated, “Telugu makes it easy for [us] to understand the text.” 42MST18, for example, said, “Telugu is my mother tongue and I like and enjoy it.” 32MST16 said, “Telugu is my mother and heart language.”

⁴⁰² Ibid., 15.

51FST14, a literate, prefers Telugu because “it is my mother tongue.” 50FST13, a semi-literate, said, “Telugu gives me the feeling of being home. We were immersed in that language from the day we were born.”

The next section of this chapter will present the findings based on the goals and strategies of this project.

Strategy 1: Discovering plural meanings of hope

Smith defines hope as “an emotion, an act, a habit, an attitude, and a passion.”⁴⁰³ Macquarie regards hope as “a universal phenomenon, one which appears in many forms and has many objects from the most trivial to the most profound.”⁴⁰⁴ Knowles considers hope as “openness. The most fundamental issue is a matter of perception.”⁴⁰⁵ The findings of this research show that the above were in fact highlighted by some of the interviewees: emotion: “like aiming to reach your goals,” 33FP1; act: “like something good can happen,” 50MA7; habit: “better clothing, regular food and better shelter,” 50FA8; attitude: “healing when I was sick,” 43FA10; and passion: “it sustains me in times of difficulty and gives me the strength to be patient,” 42MST18. The illustrations shared by the eighteen interviewees also show how hope “appears in many forms and has many objects.” Their descriptions also show the various “perception(s)” that each had of hope. No matter how close the similarities were drawn in the concepts of hope that each and every one of the interviewees had, each was perceived in its own “phenomenon” and “context”,

⁴⁰³ David L. Smith, “A Phenomenological Reflection on the Experience of Hope,” *The Humanist Psychology* 35, no. 1 (2007): 82.

⁴⁰⁴ John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 2.

⁴⁰⁵ Richard Knowles, *Human Development and Human Possibility: Erikson in the Light of Heidegger* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 22.

creating a “universality” of positions and understandings. Below are excerpts of the responses of all three groups on hope.

Printed

The interviewees in the printed group shared their personal understanding of hope thus: 33FP1, a young housemaid, has been living in Dubai for two years. She feels that for Telugus hope means

to become rich and wealthy irrespective of the way and means they chose to become so. It means to reach your goals irrespective of how and what you do. People hope for things by choosing to do different things. Some fast and pray, others cheat or buy lottery tickets with the hope that they will become rich. I always hoped for a good life and wanted to get married. Unfortunately, after getting married, we were separated because my husband was drinking and cheating on me. My father was already dead when I got married and my brothers were very young. I did not have anyone to support me and advise my husband to stop his bad habits. This was bad and all my hopes were shattered then.

43MP2 is a young man who has been living in Dubai for two years now. He said,

Telugus’ understanding of hope is that they want to become rich quickly, even if that meant to cheat people and get their money without even working hard for it. Telugus put all their strength and wisdom to achieve their hope. For me hope is wishing for something, waiting and looking forward to.

32MP3 is a young man who has been living in the UAE for ten years. Similarly, he feels that Telugus’ understanding of hope is to become rich, interestingly an idea repeated by several interviewees, irrespective of the means they choose to do so. “For me,” he said, “hope is to have a good job and a daily wage. However, I neither got a good job nor a good wage. Even when I had a job, I was not paid well.”

38FP4 has been living in Dubai for nine years. Hope for her means

aiming to become healthy and prosperous. Like other Telugus, hope is to fulfill my personal ambitions with all my strength and means. My marriage was a love marriage, and I did not know God when I got

married. I paid a heavy price for it when my husband left me. I have three children, and I need to support them by sending money back home. There were times when I was strongly tempted to end my life. Now that I am a believer and have faith in Christ, I am able to take care of my responsibilities.

For 40FP5, who has been living in Dubai for two years, hope means “waiting in anticipation. It means to achieve something great in life. Like other Telugus, I want to become rich and successful. I fear God though while others don’t.”

36MP6, a young man who has been living in Dubai for two years, believes that hope is

to look forward. I did not know God before and always hoped to achieve something big and be successful in life, even if that meant hurting others. None of my plans worked out though. I got sick in 2000 when I first came to Dubai for work. I was sent back to India unconscious and almost dead. God healed me, and I got married and came back to Dubai after 12 years. Unfortunately, I forgot God and went back to the world. In 2006, I became a Christian and this time my son was diagnosed with a lump in his stomach, similar to the disease I had had. God healed my son and this is where God spoke to me again, and I experienced his healing in my life one more time.

36MP6’s healing experiences echo Perry et al.’s belief that “recovery cannot take place without hope, as hope provides a person with the essential elements of recovery: the courage to change, to try and trust.”⁴⁰⁶

Audio

50MA7 has been living in the UAE for the last five years. His understanding of hope is

feeling that something good will happen in the future. Telugus aim to find hope in their lives through their Hindu religious leaders and do whatever they tell them to do. For Telugus, hope is trusting in these matters that take them into bondage and superstitions. I always hoped that some help will come in way of finding a job abroad. Three times

⁴⁰⁶ Beth M. Perry, Damian Taylor and Samantha K. Shaw, “You’ve Got to Have a Positive State of Mind: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Hope and First Episode Psychosis,” *Journal of Mental Health* 16, no. 6 (December 2007): 782.

the agents in India took my money and passport and disappeared. I lost everything. I had hope and lost everything.

50FA8 has been living in the UAE for ten years. She believes that hope is “to have better clothing, regular food, and better shelter, but I was all the time suffering from poverty.” She also said that the Telugu people in her village worshipped gods with the hope of having a better life. “They believed that they will prosper when they show kindness to these gods. Ever since I became Christian and knew Jesus my position changed. My needs are met, and I am no longer suffering,” she concluded.

55FA9 has been living in UAE for fifteen years. “Telugus please gods with the hope that they will get favor from them,” she said. “They offer sacrifices out of obligation so that they can earn marks for their lives.” She then explained that hope for her means “having a better house, good education for my children and material things. None of these happened; on the contrary, my house was robbed and then destroyed by a hurricane. I had to build everything from scratch.” In this context, Smith finds that there is no hope without the temptation of despair: “Hope is the very act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome.”⁴⁰⁷

43FA10 has been living in the UAE for one year. Before coming to the UAE, she lived and worked in Qatar for fourteen years. Hope for her means to

have healing whenever I am sick and more salary when I am employed. Whereas in the Telugu culture, hope means that some good will happen by pleasing the gods and being religious. I got married when I was seventeen, but we are separated now because my husband lives with another woman. I was the first one who became a Christian in my family. I am happy I did because life is an empty place without Christ. The Grace of God heals and fills our lives.

⁴⁰⁷ David L. Smith, “A Phenomenological Reflection on the Experience of Hope,” *The Humanist Psychology* 35, no. 1 (2007): 87.

32MA11 became Christian while working in the UAE. He lived in the UAE for five years and then went back home to India. Now, he is back and has been working in the UAE for the last eight months. Hope for him means

to aim and achieve a prosperous business. I prayed to as many gods as possible with the hope to find prosperity hoping that business will improve and that my income will be better. Now that I have Jesus, my expectations are different. Also, I am more confident.

37MA12 has been living in the UAE for ten years. Hope for him is

a better future. I aimed for that through fortunetellers and worshipping idols. I became Christian through my aunt. When I came to know about sin and hell and also about Job and how he suffered but never lost hope, I confessed my sins and believed that Christ died on the cross and rose again and made me His child.

Storytelling

50FST13 has been living in the UAE for fifteen years. Her understanding of hope is similar to the Telugu beliefs, where people fast and pray to please their gods to get a favor. Her understanding of hope was contractual, that is, “I do something good to the gods to get a favor in return. But all that changed when I accepted Jesus during a spiritual conference where I met a Christian man and we got married.”

51FST14 has been living in the UAE for nine years. She has been Christian all her life. She understands that hope is “doing good things to others just like God will do good to me.” 53FST15, twenty-two years in the UAE, has been Christian all her life. In spite of Hindu and Muslim religions within the Telugu communities, she has lived and experienced the Christian hope within the same multi-religious context.

32MST16, of Hindu background and nine years in the UAE, understands hope as

looking forward to for help. In the Telugu culture, people go to fortunetellers and pay money and get charms and tie it on either their head or neck to have protection and have good lives. I was an alcoholic when I was a young boy. I never cared for the future, went into depression and wanted to end my life. It was then that a man

invited me to a youth retreat and I came to know Jesus. I started experiencing the hope of Christ since that day.

It is interesting to note that these three persons belong to larger families with Hindu believers who express to them the Hindu version of hope. Hence, what is revealed here is that there are three kinds of hope involved: Hindu, Christian, and a blend of the two. Presumably, the same applies to the other interviewees who grew up in such a milieu.

25MST17 has been living in the UAE for five years, and he believes

hope is that which gives me comfort when I am in difficulty. I had a lot of family problems. Often, I felt like a loser and wanted to commit suicide. My family used to tell me that I was useless, and I was always rejected. The real hope in life came to me when I met Jesus.

42MST18 has been living in the UAE for the last eight years. For him hope is “something to look forward to. It is looking forward to the bright side of things. It sustains me in times of difficulty and gives me the strength to be patient.” His perspectives confirm what Nolan explains: “Possessing hope is the most valuable asset a person can have and to travel hopefully is sufficient even if you never arrive.”⁴⁰⁸

Strategy 2: Interact with the three Bible stories to explore dimensions of Christian hope

Schumacher defines ordinary hope as interchangeable, that is, it changes constantly according to circumstances, whereas fundamental hope is unique and is the complete fulfillment of the person.⁴⁰⁹ This fundamental hope is “essentially unchangeable... and its exact form of which remains veiled and unknown: beatitude,

⁴⁰⁸ Peter Nolan, “Hope Regained: Light at the end of the tunnel,” *Mental Health Practice* 11, no. 2 (October 2007): 34.

⁴⁰⁹ Bernard Schumacher, *A Philosophy of Hope: Josef Pieper and the Contemporary Debate on Hope*, trans. D.C. Schindler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 7.

full existence, the ultimate, decisive, and most profound satisfaction.”⁴¹⁰ This hope is primarily concerned with survival, but it also hopes and struggles to avoid falling into non-being.⁴¹¹ Schumacher illustrates this reality as the hope that is “unable to achieve its objects simply on the basis of the individual’s own resources, but also requires a gift from the other.”⁴¹² Zahl (argues that hope in the New Testament is posited on things done and promises kept just like Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:14 tying hope to the raising of Christ.⁴¹³

The testimonies below indicate that change has/is taking place in the life of the migrants. We can also see how promises were/are kept and how faith in Christ was/is not vain and was/has been leading the migrants’ lives.

Printed

33FP1 indicated that she read the three biblical texts ten times. She was fascinated by the three women,

They exercised their faith in times of difficulty. Their prayers were answered and they got their rewards. I was encouraged by their faith, especially the Canaanite woman who never gave up even when Jesus was indifferent to her. I strongly believe and have hope that God will make miracles in my life. God will give me a good husband and children. I will never leave God no matter how difficult my life is.

43MP2 said he read the texts four times and added,

What struck me most was the woman who was sick for 18 years. She did not lose her zeal all these years and waited patiently for God to heal her. God is the God of impossibilities. There is a waiting time though. Sometimes he answers our questions sometimes not. We have confidence though that in His time he will answer.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 102.

⁴¹¹ Smith, “A Phenomenological Reflection,” 85.

⁴¹² Schumacher, *A Philosophy of Hope*, ” 5.

⁴¹³ Paul Zahl, “Preaching on Hope,” *The Living Pulpit* (Jan-March 2012): 10.

32MP3 had read the texts five times. His understanding of hope from all the three texts was in the reality that “God honored the faith of all three women.” The latter was a reality that encouraged him. He specifically focused on the Canaanite woman and said, “She had great faith and hope. She never stopped pleading even when Jesus was indifferent to her.”

38FP4 reported that she had read the texts five times. She was very much blessed by the woman who touched Jesus’ cloak. “The woman was so desperate and tried all possible means to be cured with no success. In spite of that, she never gave up hope, and she finally got help from Jesus.” She then shared her understanding of Christian hope and faith and said, “I put myself in her position, and I sensed the great joy she had after the healing. It challenges me to have that kind of simple faith. I came to know Jesus in person just like the three women came to know him personally.”

40FP5 read the texts three times. She said that she saw “great faith” rather than “great hope”: the woman was suffering from bleeding for twelve years. In spite of that, she had great faith that Jesus will heal her.” This was an interesting, almost fresh perspective that underscores the interviewee’s independence and willingness to provide an alternative answer to the question of hope. Her response confirmed her belief that faith instilled hope of healing in the woman. Hence, she was very much impressed and encouraged by the faith of the woman who had suffered from bleeding. She never gave up her faith for all these years, and she was finally healed. “The experience of the woman challenged me,” she said and continued, “I have now the desire not to be casual in my prayers and plead to God with all my heart.”

36MP6 said that he had read the texts ten times. He was first impressed by the hope and faith of the Canaanite woman. “The Canaanite woman was not a Jew but she had hope and more than that she had faith.” 36MP6 compared the official of the

synagogue in Luke 13:10-17 to Jairus who was also an official. “The first official was legalistic and angry. The second one was very humble and had great hope that his daughter will be cured. The women in the text suffered much more than I do. They had a lot of hope. I am aiming to have the same kind of hope like the women.”

Audio

50MA7 of the audio section had listened to the texts six times. He was very much impressed by the story of Jesus healing the crippled woman. “There is God’s timing,” he said. “The woman was bent for eighteen years and God never met her. I always wanted to come to Dubai to make a living and take care of my children but it did not happen. Just like there was God’s time for the woman, I also saw my time with God,” he concluded. He then shared his life story,

I waited for a long time to come to Dubai, and finally I am here. My children are all educated and my daughter is married. All of my children became followers of Jesus. This is my joy. I do have a concern for my other children to get married though. Just like Jesus took care of the three women in the stories my hope in Him is that He will also take care of my concern, too. The three women were neglected in the community just like us migrants in the UAE. God took care of the three women, and I am confident that he will also take care of me and the other migrants.

50FA8 has listened to the texts twenty times. She was very much impressed by the “simple and strong faith” of the woman who had bled for many years. “God who did such a miracle to the problems of this woman can do the same to me, too,” she said. She then linked her life story with that of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by demons. “The Canaanite woman asked and pleaded to Jesus persistently and her daughter was cured. I pleaded to God the same way and prayed for the salvation and the education of my children. God answered my prayers, and my children are all educated and followers of Jesus,” she concluded.

55FA9 has listened to the audio texts three times. She could relate her life situation with all the three women in the texts. “I could very well relate to the woman who was bent. Just like she was in pain, I, too, was in pain. My salary was very low with no proper food and clothing. I even pawned my golden ring and borrowed money to educate my children. My husband did not have a proper job. I could relate to the difficulties of the women and the way she never lost hope.” She continued,

I can also relate to the woman who touched Jesus’ cloak. The turning point in my life started only when I touched Jesus. Things changed in my life after that. In the third story, just like the Canaanite woman persistently pleaded to Jesus and was healed, I did the same. My life in Dubai has not been easy for the last fifteen years. When I came to Dubai I felt homesick and left, but I never lost my hope and confidence in God. I returned to Dubai and have now adjusted myself and am making a living. I honored God and God liked that. I want to be stronger like the women in the texts and have more hope and faith. I want to grow more in the Lord.

43FA10 has listened to the texts twice. She is very much impressed by the story of the crippled woman who was healed on the Sabbath. “She kept on coming to the synagogue even when she was not aware of all the details,” she said. “The woman trusted and hoped that God will honor her and he finally did. This is my comfort and hope that this same God will help me in my difficulties.” She then shared her perspective of hope based on the text and said, “I want to aim and grow in the kind of faith and hope that the three women had.”

32MA11 has listened to the texts eight times. He was very much encouraged and inspired by all the three texts. “It helped me to have greater faith,” he said. He explained his understanding of hope thus: “The three stories helped me to grow in faith. The three women suffered a lot and their prayers were answered. The latter experience was a source of encouragement to me.”

37MA12 has listened to the texts four times. “Just like the three women in the stories were blessed and their prayers were answered, I also feel this great gratitude.

God does the same thing with my life, too,” he commented. He then related the situation and the problems of the three women to his own life and continued, “All the three stories made me stronger in faith. I had serious problems in my life similar to those women. Just like God helped the three women, he is also helping me in my life. This is my hope.”

Storytelling

50FST13 is one of the six members of the storytelling group who heard the texts the first time when Babu Ganta presented it. She then listened to it several times when another person from the group told the story again and each one of them did the same by taking turns. This was then followed by asking questions about the story and discussing them together. She was very much encouraged by the hope and faith of the bent woman.

She never gave up. She kept on going to the synagogue and was religious without losing her hope that one day God will heal her. She eventually saw that day and was cured. God had divine plans to bring health and glory to the woman. I learned that I should not be discouraged and find excuses not to hope in God and neglect worshipping him. He is in control. Jairus humbled himself and pleaded to Jesus. I learned that I needed to humble myself and have hope and faith in God.

51FST14 was very much encouraged by the hope and faith of the bent woman.

The lady was bent for eighteen years, and she could see only the ground. People looked down on her, but she never gave up and persisted by coming to the synagogue with the hope that one day Jesus will heal her. I learned to stay focused and not be distracted by the negative comments of people around and God will bless me. There is nothing impossible for God. God rewards even those who come with a simple faith.

53FST15 said,

The woman who was bent for eighteen years was insignificant. Jesus not only found and noticed her but he also saved her. In the second story, Jairus, in spite of his high rank, did not send any messenger but humbled himself and met Jesus and pleaded for his daughter’s healing. Jesus healed his daughter. In the third story, the Canaanite woman

came to Jesus with a simple faith and touched his cloak and received healing. Her faith was honored. The woman did not feel embarrassed by the crowd rather she pushed her way to meet and touch Jesus. The three women went to the synagogue without being discouraged. I was impressed by their persistence. We need to be as persistent in our faith and hope in God.

32MST16 said,

When I first heard the story, it was interesting. But I had to listen to it several times to understand it better and get the treasures that I could not get by reading. Hope in my life started with Jesus. I could very well relate my life story with that of the woman who was bent for eighteen years. Just like the woman I, too, had problems. My parents were sick, and I was a very careless boy. I had a job and thought that it was safe and secure, so I borrowed money and built a house. I lost my job because of the recession in Dubai and went back to India with debts and interest on the money borrowed constantly increasing. I felt very miserable and hopeless. I came back to Dubai, found a job and settled all my dues. My experience, like the bent woman, tells that there is God's timing. We need to wait and not lose our hope. Jesus, just like he healed the problems of the women, can also solve and cure my problems no matter how difficult they are. This reality gives me the zeal and the passion to talk about Jesus to others.

25MST17 indicated that the truths of the passages were recorded in his mind.

He said, "Just like Jesus met the needs of the three women in the texts, he also meets all my needs. The texts helped me to grow in my faith and be strengthened to cope with my health problems as well as all the other issues at work." He added, "These stories helped me to understand hope and gave me the confidence to share it with my friends."

42MST18 said,

Hearing the stories again helped me to appreciate the details and learn how to apply them to my personal life. The texts are not empty words. I had read the texts before but it is so different when you hear it as a story. You realize that it is not a story of the past, but that it has a message for today. The latter strengthened my understanding of hope in life. The central figure in the three stories is Jesus Christ. He helps me to grow more in my hope and faith.

Strategy 3: Comparing, contrasting, and evaluating their original views of hope with biblical aspects of hope

Straus argues that standing erect is not only a physiological reality but also has an in-depth human psychological side. He explains that humankind is not only the end of a long development, but it also represents a new beginning.⁴¹⁴ In this context, he defines “upright posture” which “pre-establishes a definite attitude toward the world; it is a specific mode of being-in-the world.”⁴¹⁵ Straus believes that “Man has to become what he is” and the fact that the “upright posture not confined to the technical problems of locomotion, it distinguishes the human genus from other living creatures.”⁴¹⁶ Straus writes that in order to reach the upright position, humans have to oppose the forces of gravity inscribing into space world-regions to which we attach values, such as those expressed by high and low, rise and decline, climbing and failing, superior and inferior, elevated and downcast, looking up and despising.⁴¹⁷ Straus concludes that the upright posture is a learning process which comes out of falling and is always threatened by falls in our lives: “Our task is not finished with getting up and standing. We have to withstand.”⁴¹⁸

As we compare and contrast the experiences of hope in general with the Christian hope in particular, we can see how the migrants have and are still opposing the forces of gravity and have gone through situations of high and low, rise and decline, climbing and falling, looking up and despising and always trying to maintain the upright posture. The migrants have aimed and still navigate into new beginnings

⁴¹⁴ Erwin Straus, “The Upright Posture,” *Phenomenological Psychology: The Selected Papers of Erwin W. Straus* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 140.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

with a definite attitude which is based on the Christian hope and which is enabling them to be in the world with a specific mode. The migrants are withstanding and are getting up and standing in their upright posture with the hope that is generating in them God's help, endurance, eternity, expectation, healing, impossible-possible, joy, love, living reality, peace, persistency, personal relations, reward, satisfaction, strength, trust, sufficiency, zeal, and finally faith which is based on God's Word. The excerpts below highlight the latter list.

Printed

33FP1 indicated that in the past her hope was based on "wishes." Now, it is focused on "God's help." She said that all three women brought their need to Jesus, and they received their answers. "My hope now is to seek God's help for my life," she continued. 43MP2 finds that the hope and blessings that the world provides are "temporary" whereas God's hope and blessings are for "eternity." 32MP3 reported that relying on God's hope and faith can provide answers; whereas, the other hope does not. He has been suffering from shaking and fits for a long time. He wholeheartedly pleaded and prayed to Jesus for healing. He has been cured from his sickness, and he realizes that God's hope is a "healing hope" and answers our needs in his time.

38FP4 indicated that her hope and faith in the past was rather "nominal." Now, she speaks to God and her hope and faith are more "personal." 40FP5 has learned "not to give up" with God's hope. Her previous understanding of hope was to wait with anticipation for something to happen and give up when it did not happen. "With the hope of the three women in the text, I learned not to give up," she commented. 36MP6 indicated that hope in Jesus helped him to enjoy more "trusting

God” and “being strengthened.” Earlier, he had always hoped and looked forward to achieving something in life but his experience was always full of calamities.

Audio

50MA7 could not see a “way out” in the Telugu sense of hope. In the Christian hope he has “peace and joy” even when he does not have answers to his problems right away. God’s hope gives him the assurance that “God will solve his problems in due time.” 50FA8 realized that the Christian hope helped her to live and worship out of “love.” In her previous Hindu context, it was practiced out of “fear.” 50FA9 feels that the Christian hope makes her “stronger in faith” and “endure better” in life. Previously, the hope she had in life never actually “materialized.”

43FA10 indicates that Christian hope “heals.” She prayed and pleaded to God for the healing of her daughter who was suffering from dengue fever. Christian hope provides “satisfaction” she said even though she is divorced and not making enough money. She is happy with her daughters and their wellbeing and that makes her happy. Christian hope also gives her “zeal and passion” to share her “faith” with others. “As a Hindu,” she said, “I could not have all these.”

32MA11 finds that hope changes “expectations” in life. He has more desire now to “grow in faith” and be able to sustain in life than before when he was more concerned about expecting better salary and housing that did not materialize.

37MA12V believes that the Christian hope “heals.” In the Hindu context, that was not the case. He had a terrible pain in his leg and was advised to go to witch craft for healing. He pleaded to God instead, even when his community made fun of him. His prayers were answered, and he was healed like the women in the stories.

Storytelling

50FST13 finds that Christian hope is a living reality and that Jesus is in control. “Previously, though, my hope was more like a contract, to do good with the expectation to get a favor in return,” she said. 51FST14 finds Christian hope rewarding. “No matter how simple your faith is, God will do, and we need to do the same to others. In Hinduism, hope is more of a conditional and favor type, good works in return for something.” 51FST15 was born a Christian. She learned that the Christian hope gives “persistency to my life, when I humbly seek guidance and blessings from Jesus.”

32MST16 said that the Christian hope is based on Jesus who “solves our problems no matter how impossible they may appear to be. It is hope that makes the impossible possible. Previously, my hope was based on material welfare and seeking help from anywhere and anybody.” 25MST17 finds that the Christian hope helps him to be sufficient in life. He finds “comfort and satisfaction” in his difficulties; whereas, before hope “did not provide me the same comfort and satisfaction.” 42MST18 defines his Christian hope as being based on “God’s Word.” He does not see it as “blind faith” rather like a “childlike” faith fully devoted to God and his hope. Whereas earlier, before becoming a Christian, he reported that his hope was based on his personal abilities.

Goal 2 (practical): To measure the effectiveness of different forms of Bible mediation by making similarities and differences in the Telugu use of printed, audio, and storytelling formats

Brueggemann indicates that the Bible has a central direction and rich diversity.⁴¹⁹ He encourages people to read the Bible as insiders. He admits that that is not easy as “we are outsiders to the language and thought patterns, to the cultural and

⁴¹⁹ Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 124.

historical assumptions.⁴²⁰ Brueggemann also indicates that the Bible is not an answer book or a good luck piece to bring God's blessings. It is precious because it offers people a way of understanding the world in a fresh perspective that leads to life, joy, and wholeness.⁴²¹ Similarly, Village asserts that what individuals bring to the act of reading has an important effect on how they understand the Bible, irrespective of where they worship. Each reader creates their own meaning on the basis of their personality type, education, and whatever else they bring to the text.⁴²² Molan lists three different groups of people who read and make a meaning of a text: one group reads and makes meaning but "camps on the edge, fearful of the abyss"; another group turns back to the past for answers, not willing to find their own way across; and the third group moves on towards the future by trying to cross the chasm and some others trying to convince and help others to make the crossing.⁴²³

The excerpts below show the way the interviewees understood and interpreted the same texts, confirming the perspectives of the authors mentioned above. We can see from the data below how the migrants have managed to read the texts as insiders, no matter how difficult that has been. Each migrant managed to link his/her own self to that of the characters and the situation in the texts and managed to reach their way of understanding in their lives that provided them with joy and wholeness. Finally, we can also see that the migrants did not camp on the edge after making meaning of the text. Even if they reflected back to their past it was not for answers rather for

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴²² Andrew Village, "The Bible and the lay people: An empirical approach to ordinary Hermeneutics," in Gert J. Malan, "Can the Chasms be Bridged? Different Approaches to Bible Reading," *www.hts.org.za*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2013): 8.

⁴²³ Gert J. Malan, "Can the Chasms be Bridged? Different Approaches to Bible Reading," *www.hts.org.za*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2013): 1.

evaluation. The migrants moved and are still moving towards the future by crossing the chasm, committed to help others do the same. Below are excerpts of some of what the six interviewees shared about each text on Jesus finds in Luke 13:10-17, Jesus saves in Luke 8:40-48, and Jesus has authority and leads in Matthew 15:21-28. Interestingly enough, as presented above, these excerpts, too, reveal that the interviewees found meanings in the texts that went beyond the goals of this project to measure a single aspect of Christian life. These insights will be evaluated in the conclusion below as they will undoubtedly inform BSG's future direction and programs.

Strategy 1: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 1: Read, reflect, and document understandings of the biblical texts

33FP1 expressed her understanding of the three texts thus:

For me, Jesus finds means simply hope. The woman did not have any previous appointment with Jesus, but she hoped that she will meet Him. And she met Jesus and she was healed. Jesus saves is equivalent to faith because it is only by faith that she touched Jesus and she was healed. As for Jesus leads, for me it means being persistent. Although Christ was indifferent, she did not give up. She persisted and managed to meet Jesus and was healed.

As for the impact the texts had on her life, 33FP1 said, "I did not ask for God's guidance when I married my husband. Now, I trust God fully and ask for his guidance. I know that he will do a miracle for me. In the meantime, I am at peace and satisfied with my life."

43MP2 understood the texts as follows:

Jesus finds is a big surprise. The first woman never asked for any favor from Jesus but she was faithful. God surprised her. I see Jesus saves as incredible faith. What the world cannot do God can. Jesus leads means strong faith to me. She was persistent in her prayer and not offended by what Jesus said. She was determined to meet Jesus and to ask for healing. Her persistence paid off.

As for the impact the texts had on his life, 43MP2 said, “I have grown in my faith after reading these three texts. No matter what problems I go through, I know that God will help me.”

32MP3 shared the following:

I understand Jesus finds as God who understands our needs. God’s power is greater than the devil’s power and Jesus was able to break it. Jesus saves means Jesus has power over death. Jairus’ daughter was dying but Jesus healed her. Jesus leads is a test of faith. The Canaanite woman never gave up pleading to Jesus no matter how indifferent he was.

As for the impact the texts had on his life, 32MP3 said, “I was very much encouraged by the Canaanite woman. No matter how much Jesus discouraged her, she kept on pleading to Him.”

38FP4 understood the texts as follows:

For me Jesus finds means God’s time. The woman was waiting desperately for Jesus, but God’s time was needed to heal her. Jesus saves means great faith. Jesus was busy but the woman never gave up meeting Him. In her simple but strong faith, she followed the crowd and waited for the opportunity to meet Jesus. As for Jesus leads, for me it means salvation guaranteed for non-Jews. The woman was a Canaanite and even then she received salvation because of her faith.

As for the impact the text had on her life, 38FP4 shared this: “I have grown in my confidence because of these three texts. If I sincerely ask God for something, I am comforted that he can make it happen.

40FP5 shared the following:

Jesus finds is exactly what it is. Jesus finds the lost. Nobody knew about the woman with the evil spirit, but Jesus did and he found her. Jesus saves means strong faith. The woman exhausted herself to meet Jesus and pleaded for healing. She finally managed to meet Jesus because of her determination and desperation. Jesus leads is simply equivalent to patience. No matter how Christ was indifferent, she was not discouraged at all. She kept on pushing herself to meet Jesus and receiving healing

36MP6 expressed his thoughts thus:

I understood Jesus finds as strong faith. The woman in the text was awakened in her faith when she realized that Jesus was calling her. She was finally released and liberated from her bondage. Jesus saves is having strong faith. The woman must have heard about Jesus and she had developed a strong faith in Him. Jesus leads is that he cares for non-Jews also.

As for the impact the texts had on his life 36MP6 said,

Jesus liberated me from my debts, addictions, and adulterous affairs. God has set me free. Jesus has accepted me even though I am a simple migrant worker. I have grown in my faith after reading these three texts. When we ask God without hesitations, we will definitely get an answer.

Strategy 2: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 2: listen, reflect, and document understandings of the biblical texts

50MA7 understood the texts as follows:

For me Jesus saves and Jesus heals mean the same, that Jesus heals. Jesus healed the women physically and spiritually. That is what healing means for me. Salvation from sin is crucial. Jesus leads is perseverance. The woman never gave up in meeting Jesus.

As for the impact the texts had on his life 50MA7 said, “The texts helped me to grow stronger in my faith. God is in control and He will take care of my needs.”

50FA8 understood the text as follows: “Jesus finds means God is powerful. Jesus saves means wonder-making God. Jesus leads means strong faith. As for the impact the stories had on me, I found out that Jesus helped all three women in their situation. And I am confident that he will take care of me in my situation, too.

55FA9 understood the texts as follows:

Jesus really finds people. He found me. The woman was faithful in coming to synagogue for eighteen years and Jesus found her. Jesus saves means great faith. Jesus leads is sheer humbleness. No matter how indifferent Jesus was, she remained humble.

55FA9 also shared her reflections on the three texts. “I can see the element of faith in all the three texts” she said. “All the three women had strong faith. It is faith that we need to maintain,” she concluded.

43FA10 understood the texts as follows:

Jesus finds is simple. It means hope. The bent woman waited for eighteen years to meet Jesus and be cured. She never lost hope that something good will come. I understand Jesus saves as healing. Christ's healing needs neither doctors nor medicine. Jesus leads is strong faith. It was like a test for the woman to see if she is strong in her faith or not. The woman took the test and did not fail. She kept on pushing hard to meet Jesus until she managed to meet Him. The woman passed the test because of her strong faith.

43FA10 also shared her reflections on the three texts: "I felt with gratitude as I read these stories again. There were times when I felt numb in my hands and feet. I prayed to God for healing so that my children will not be orphaned. God answered my prayers and I was healed."

32MA11 understood the texts as follows:

Jesus finds is Jesus heals. Jesus saves is Jesus heals. Jesus leads is having faith. The woman never stopped pleading with God so that she will be cured. The faith of the three women gave me the desire to have more faith like them.

37MA12 understood the texts as follows:

For me Jesus finds is God who gives life. The woman was bent for many years. She was as good as a dead person. Jesus gave life to her. Jesus saves is God who makes the impossible possible. It was impossible to cure Jairus' daughter but Jesus cured her. Jesus leads is having great faith. The woman was not ashamed and kept on pushing to meet Jesus. She had great faith.

37MA12 shared his reflections after reading the texts and said, "I am much happier now than before. In the past, I used to watch TV for hours and hours to pass my time. Now, I put my headphones and listen to God's Word through the audio player."

Strategy 3: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 3: listen, reflect, and document understandings of the biblical texts through storytelling

42MST18 understood the texts as follows:

Jesus finds is Jesus finds. It cannot be anything else. Similarly, Jesus saves means Jesus saves because that is what he did in the texts. For me there is difference between physical and spiritual healing. Salvation is when someone is saved from his/her sins. Physical healing is only

one aspect. What is equally and more important is spiritual healing. Jesus leads is that Jesus not only leads but he also meets our needs.

42MST18 also shared his reflections on the texts:

All the three texts reflected my life, as if I was looking into a mirror. I could see my weaknesses, shortcomings, and areas in my life where I need to improve my faith. My daughter has physical problems, and I do not have the financial means to help her. The stories helped me to strengthen my faith that God shall heal her by his means and in his own time.

25MST17 shared his thoughts thus: “Jesus finds means simply that Jesus finds. Jesus saves also has the same meaning for me that Jesus saves. Similarly, with Jesus leads.” As for the impact the text had on his life, 25MST17 said, “All the three texts speak about problems. I saw my problems in these stories. The same God who solved all the problems in the stories can also solve my problems.”

32MST16’s following understanding of the texts conveys a sense of critical thinking, a valuable insight worth consideration in future endeavors by the BSG:

I understand Jesus finds as really Jesus finds the lost. Jesus saves is Jesus heals just like in the three texts. I was a bit confused about Jesus leads because I could not see where and how Jesus led in the stories.

As for the impact the text had on his life, 32MST16 said,

I realized that I am a sinner and I believe that Jesus died, was buried and rose again and He will come and take me to his family because of what he did on the cross. After hearing these three stories, I am more confident that God can solve any problem. It also gives me more readiness to tell about this God to others.

53FST15 shared her understanding of the texts:

Jesus finds is actually Jesus finds. When nobody recognized the bent woman, Jesus did. Jesus saves is having great faith. It is because of their great faith that they were saved. Jesus leads is simply perseverance and prayer, prayer without giving up. The woman persisted and never gave up and her prayers were answered.

53FST15 shared her reflections on the text and said,

God will solve problems no matter how difficult they are. Also, never be ashamed of God like the woman in the story who was not

embarrassed. We also need to be humble. The woman in the text remained humble even when Jesus said “throw it to the dogs.” Jesus was tough on her and in a way He was testing her, yet she remained humble.

51FST14 shared the following:

I understand Jesus finds as Jesus finding those who need him. Jesus found the woman in her situation and he cured her. Jesus saves is God who heals. Jesus leads is humbleness. The woman in the text humbled herself even when Jesus said “throw it to the dogs.”

51FST14 also shared her reflection on the texts and said, “I was a shy person and after being exposed to these texts I became bold to share God’s Word with others. I am more confident now because of the great faith I saw in these texts.

50FST13 explained the texts as follows:

Jesus finds means that we should not lose hope because Jesus will find us and bring us to him. The woman was anonymous but Jesus found her. Jesus saves is that Jesus is the divine doctor. Jesus is the doctor who healed the woman when no other doctor could do that. Jesus leads is following Jesus and not giving up. The woman was very humble and never gave up even when Jesus was indifferent and used tough words.

As for the impact the text had on her life, 50FST13 said, “I learned to be more humble and persevere in my prayers and go to church regularly.”

The next section will present the findings of the interviews with the pastors of six different churches. The purpose of the interviews was to assess the use and impact of BSG’s BE tools in their ministries and congregations. To keep the anonymity of the interviewees, each pastor will be referred to by his initials and the church denomination they serve.

The use of Bible mediation tools by six different churches

Bonhoeffer asserts that Christianity without discipleship is Christianity without Christ.⁴²⁴ For him, church means being the body of Christ; of being Jesus to

⁴²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 64.

our communities and nations something which enables people to demonstrate the power of changed lives and values as they learn together under God's reign as King.⁴²⁵ In the same vein, Ballard argues that Christian worship is trinitarian in form and essence, that is, it reflects the shape of the Gospel. For him, there is an essentially theological rationale, whatever the historical forces that have influenced its particular expressions and however diverse its expression is culturally. It moves from humble access and adoration to the proclamation of the Word.⁴²⁶ The latter creates a story that is offered in compassion and love, and we are invited to join our story to God's story.⁴²⁷ It is a learning process that enables people to be aware of their cultural baggage and this affects the way they understand and act upon the Word. Ballard sees this as both a challenge and an opportunity.⁴²⁸

Indeed, as we go through the testimonies and reflections of the leaders of the six different church traditions interviewed for this project, we can clearly see a whole world of diversity in doctrinal and cultural traditions. Despite these differences we can see how the proclamation of the Word is taking shape in different communities. Also, we can see how each migrant's story is linked to God's story despite the linguistic and cultural differences of each member of the body of Christ.

For example, Father MH from the Coptic Church in Jabal Ali, Dubai, shared the following information about the make-up of his congregation and their challenges:

The language of worship in the Coptic Church is Arabic and Coptic. Besides the regular church services, we have Sunday school, young

⁴²⁵ Dan Yarnell, "The Spirit Says 'Yes': Exploring the Essence of Being Church in the 21st Century," *Evangel* 26, no. 1 (spring 2008): 10.

⁴²⁶ Paul Ballard, "The Scriptures in Church and Pastoral Practice," *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (January 2007): 38.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Yarnell, "The Spirit Says 'Yes'," 11.

adults, women's ministry, and migrants' Bible study. The Egyptian migrant workers are all men, as the Egyptian government does not allow women to work abroad as maids. These live alone work mainly on construction sites and farms. Their salaries are very low. There is a lot of homesickness but no suicidal cases. Coptic Egyptians are very much attached to their church. When they come to the UAE, they like to be part of the church. Egyptians are usually simple and optimistic people and believe in the hope for a better tomorrow. Telling jokes is usually part of the Egyptian culture, reflecting their life style and habits. The latter not only releases their tension and stress but also helps them to easily understand the Christian hope of a better tomorrow. The priest encourages them and speaks to the migrants about the Christian hope, especially during the confessions. 20% of the migrant community cannot come to church for various reasons. So, we have special programs where we go and visit them in their homes and workplaces.

When asked about the use of the BE tools in his congregation, Father MH said the following:

We use all three formats of Bible mediation tools. Storytelling is preferred the most because it helps them to concentrate and attracts their attention. Audios are made available because they can take it back with them to their workplace and home. The audios contain Scripture texts and sermons/studies on Coptic doctrine. The printed Scripture is used during the weekly Bible study where the church teaches the Bible using power point facilities, displaying the verses on the screen and helping them to follow with the Bible in their hands. Many semi-literate migrants prefer to use the printed Scripture. We especially appreciate BSG's literacy program designed to teach adults the alphabet using the Scriptures. Audios and DVDs are almost bestsellers for our congregation.

Father TBV of the Catholic (Filipino congregation) Church gave the following information about his congregation and said,

The language of worship is of course Tagalog. The Filipinos like to have the mass in their language. It is their mother tongue, and it gives them the feeling of being home. We have sacramental, social, family, prayer, and pious groups, charismatic groups for maids, youth, labor camp and safe house ministries. The men and women in our congregation are mostly married with families but they come alone to the UAE where usually they face many problems. Their salaries are very low and are paid irregularly. Women usually suffer from abusive employers and homesickness, especially those with young children back home, while men migrants sometimes become alcoholic, sexually promiscuous, or thieves.

About the use of BE tools in his church he said,

We use all the three formats of Bible mediation tools. Most Filipinos are literate and like to use the printed Bible, some in Tagalog others in English. Some also use the audio format. Storytelling is usually used by the priest during the sermons and masses. The church plays an important place in the life of the Filipinos. Even if Filipinos do not attend church services regularly, they respect it and are very much influenced by it. The Filipinos listen to the teachings that are offered by the priest. We try to encourage them so that they do not lose their hope in the Scriptures. We always remind them that the day will come when they will go back home and unite with their families.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church leader, Pastor YT, offered this information about his congregation:

Our language of worship is Amharic. Ethiopians do not mingle easily with other cultures. They like to stick to their language and culture. Our services include regular church services, youth ministry, and church plantation. We are very much involved in evangelization and offer special courses to train leaders to do so. We also reach the migrants through small Bible study groups and our one-to-one ministry.

Concerning the challenges faced by the members, Pastor YT said,

The majority of the migrants are women and work as maids. Recently, men also started coming to work in the UAE and are employed primarily on construction sites. The majority of them are Christian. They face many problems, especially the maids who are sometimes forced to change their names into Islamic names. Others have difficulty practicing their faith. Unfortunately, many are both physically and psychologically abused. We have seen maids who went into hospital because of physical abuse and have come out of the experience with more faith. This is because of the power of the Scripture. They do not stay silent about their transformation. They go out and share their experience with others. Some of them who leave the UAE and go back home stay in touch with us, and they share their faith experience in the UAE.

Pastor YT reported the following about the use of BE tools in his congregation,

The printed Bible is the most used Scripture mediation tool in our church. No audios are available even though they are in great demand by the migrants. We have not started using storytelling yet but look forward to it with the help of the Bible Society. The church plays a crucial role in the life of the Ethiopian community. It is said, 'if you have two Ethiopians in the neighborhood, you can have a church'.

Another church leader interviewed for this study was Rev. AK, pastor of the Pakistan Pentecostal Church. This is what he shared with me,

The language of worship in our church is Urdu. We have all the regular ministries: church services, youth group, children's ministry, and labor camp ministry where we conduct regular Bible studies and prayer meetings. The Pakistani migrants are low salaried workers. Only 30% are literate and the rest are illiterate. They go through a number of problems, the main one being salaries, which are not paid regularly. Whatever they earn they send it back home to pay their dues. They feel lonely and depressed. Around 80% of the migrants are men.

Rev. AK said this about the use of the BE tools in his church:

Our church uses the printed and audio Bible in Urdu, more in audio though. Storytelling is not yet practiced in the Pakistani church. We have heard about it and think it would really suit our congregation. The church conducts prayer group meetings in the labor camps and distributes the audio Bibles and sermons to help them engage with the hope of the Scriptures. Every week, three to four pastors visit the camps and minister to the Pakistani laborers. The church has ministry among non-Christian Pakistani migrants, too. They look for their own language group to talk and share their concerns. The church feels that a good number of their migrant communities receive the hope of the Scriptures. They leave their superstitious beliefs and practices, such as fortune telling, and accept the Christian faith. Moreover, they share their Christian faith experience with their friends in the camps and do the same when they go back home. Whenever I go to Pakistan, I try to visit and meet them. In fact, we just started financially supporting a church that was founded by a migrant laborer in our congregation in Pakistan.

St. Martin's Anglican Church was another church whose pastor, Rev. Dr. EV, I interviewed to gather information about the needs of his congregation and the impact of the BE tools on his congregation. This is what he shared with me,

The language of worship is English as the church caters to many ethnic groups between Indians, Sri Lankans, Africans, Pakistanis, and others. Besides the regular church services, the Anglican Church is very much involved in migrant ministry, conducting services and prayer groups in the labor camps among different ethnic groups, all in the migrants' own ethnic languages. The challenges that some of our members face are low income, lack of medical services, poor living conditions, and abuse.

The pastor outlined the use of the different mediation tools thus,

The church uses printed and audio Bible mediation tools in different languages. Those of the migrants who are literate prefer the printed, others the audio. We just started using the storytelling Scripture mediation tool. It is usually best practiced by telling the story once and then encouraging them to either read or listen to the same. The latter will help them to think and rationalize what they heard. The church has ministry in the labor camps every day in four different locations. We also reach out to Hindu and Muslim migrants. We have noticed that all migrants prefer to be engaged with the Scripture and its message in their mother tongue. And that's what we do. When they come to know Jesus, they experience the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit and it makes them much stronger. They face challenges more confidently and also feel that they have the church as a family that supports them while they are in the UAE. One of the migrants who went back home has now planted three churches on the Indian Nepali boarder.

The pastor of the Telugu Christian Evangelical Church, Pastor IR, was also among those I interviewed. This is what he informed me about his congregation:

The language of worship is Telugu. We have services in three locations every week. The church is composed of migrants, and their literacy rate is very low. They come from different labor camps and often this is a problem as bringing them to church is a concern. Our members have a number of problems. They are separated from their family and feel homesick. Salaries are rather low and not regularly paid. Many have debts back home that they need to settle. Hardly anyone has medical insurance. They are always subject to accidents because of heat or while working on the construction sites. Addictions, abuse, and adultery are common both among women and men.

Pastor IR said this about their use of BE tools,

We use the printed Bible very much. The semi-literate migrants want to carry the printed Bible with them because they want to show others that they are literate and can read. Others carry the printed Bible in order to ask their literate friends to read it to them. I recently started using the storytelling tool during my sermons. The migrants like it very much because it is interesting and the question-answer session afterwards makes them more involved. It also helps them to apply the story in their own life situation.

Pastor IR's words provide an important piece of information on the Telugus who want to carry the printed Bible with them even if they cannot read. This insight informs the BSG that a printed Bible is a form of BE even for non-readers because it functions as an icon and status symbol and an occasion for interacting with readers. Such a

perspective on the Telugus from another source is definitely worth investigating to better inform the work of the BSG.

Similar to some of the other churches interviewed for this study, Pastor IR, informed me about their outreach programs among non-Christians.

The church ministers to Telugus who are of Hindu background. Hindus are attracted to Jesus because of his miracles. The church tries to teach them about Jesus. The need for the use of contemporary Telugu language in the church services is a crucial must. Ministering among the Telugu migrant workers has many challenges though. The migrants, whose salaries are low, want to make money in different ways, most of which being illegal. We have testimonies where migrants have obeyed the Scriptures and God has helped them by having an increase in their salaries. These examples help them to see the reality of their faith. We have had cases where some were excommunicated by their communities for becoming Christian. We have 7 migrants who went back to their villages and started doing God's work there. Last Sunday, out of the 100 people who heard a story from the Bible, 30 shared their interest not only to learn the story but also to share it with others. One of our members of Hindu background used to drink a lot. He spent his money on liquor and never sent money back home to his family. He also owed a lot of money to some people back in his hometown. His family were taken hostage and treated like slaves by the man he owed money to. He heard the Gospel message and became a Christian and accepted Jesus as his savior. He is completely a different person now, more responsible and sober. He started regularly sending money back home and managed to pay his debts. His wife and children came to know Christ because of him and they are all united again as a family.

The use of mediation tools by the churches and Telugu migrants

From the data gathered from the Telugu migrants and pastors of six different churches in the UAE, it is safe to assume that most migrants, irrespective of their ethnic and linguistic differences, share the same plight: monetary difficulties, physical and psychological abuse, addictions, homesickness, loneliness, and alienation. The silver lining here is the existence of the churches which are trying their best to reach out to as many migrants as possible, instilling the hope, love, and care that is in Jesus Christ. Clearly, the needs are diverse, and the churches are utilizing every tool to engage their congregations with the Christian message of hope. Apparently, the

churches and migrants are under a lot of heavy burdens, each according to their needs. These, in fact, challenge the BSG to persevere in its ministry and raise awareness about these needs and amazing ministries rendered by the churches in order to urge donors, sponsors, and partners to reach as many as possible with the Word of God in the format they understand and can use. Indeed, when the churches were asked about their expectations from the BSG, they were unanimous in their response: “we appreciate the BSG’s ministry and wish you would continue providing us with Scriptures in as many languages as you can; train our leaders in biblical matters; provide as many MVPs as you can and in as many languages as you can; and train our leaders in this groundbreaking tool called storytelling.”

All the interviewees’, migrant workers and church leaders, words testify to the importance of the linguistic factor. Each migrant likes to have the mediation tool in his/her own mother language. That is what they understand best and feel at home with. The churches recognize this essential element in their ministry and look to the BSG to provide the necessary BE tools to reach their Amharic, Arabic, Telugu, Tagalog, and Urdu speaking congregations. Even though it is beyond the purposes of this study, this explains the proliferation of churches in the UAE. If the church wants to spread the message of hope and God’s plan of salvation to desperate, abused, and lost migrant workers from 150 different linguistic groups, then they have to do it in the mother language of that particular migrant. In fact, this is the vision of the BSG, and the findings of the project reconfirm all present and future efforts in fulfilling such a basic imperative.

Another important element in the comparison process is “confidence in the Bible and the church.” Kybird indicates, “The Bible as a resource and tool is of utmost significance in shaping the adult Christian as a mature person in Christ. There

is a sense of confidence in the institution (albeit a renewed ecumenical institution) and also in the critical approach to the Bible.”⁴²⁹ We can clearly see from the illustrations as to how the migrants have confidence in the “institution”, the Church, and the way its Message is conveyed through the Bible and the clergy.

Howard affirms that spiritual formation into a meaning of life is not just a matter of finding a vision. It is more a Christian vision connected with appropriate means.⁴³⁰ In this context, the meaning of Christian hope is channeled to all the migrants using all the three different mediation tools. The degree of using the means changes with each language/culture and church group; nevertheless, the common practice shows that all the three mediation tools are needed in engaging the Message in the migrants’ context and in the language that they understand and the culture that they belong to.

Rightly, Yarnell defines the church as a “community... it involves the shared experiences of marginalization, danger, disorientation and ultimately finding God afresh as we follow him in his mission.”⁴³¹ It should be noted that what the churches are doing in the UAE is not only establishing a culture of being “churched” by sharing the experiences of the “marginalized, endangered and disoriented” migrants, but also helping them, with the use of various Bible mediation tools, to be engaged in an “ongoing, obedient relationship with God.”⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Paul Kybird, “Using Bible in Adult Christian Education,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 3, no. 1 (2006): 54.

⁴³⁰ Evan B. Howard, “Spiritual Formation and the Meaning of Life,” *Common Ground Journal* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 21.

⁴³¹ Yarnell, “The Spirit Says ‘Yes’,” 12.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 11.

Goal 3 (socio-economic): To increase in measureable ways the application of Christian hope to Telugu migrant workers' current life experiences

Crockett believes that teaching scripture is the fundamental task of Christian education. He relates this education process to the “metaphor of exodus” which was Israel’s “calling card.” The latter became Israel’s “vocation and mission in life” which was “grounded in the historical experience for their freedom from Pharaoh in search of the promised land.”⁴³³ The exodus strategy of education uses sociopolitical analysis, and its aim is to help learners discover and explore the relationship between individual problems and public life. The strategy is aimed to for both teachers and learners to discover God’s presence in ministry with others.⁴³⁴ The exodus strategy is highlighted by four consequences: the orientation which highlights all the matters and issues that are taking place in the learners’ environment; action formulation which helps the learner to construct creative alternatives to life in comparison to the present one; the exodus which helps the learner to do and participate in God’s promises; and revising the witness which is a reflection on the witness, revise the action to be initiated and inspiring and supporting God’s people for a long term commitment.⁴³⁵

Crockett’s exodus strategy and its four consequences apply to the migrants’ challenges in the diaspora and the way they are being nurtured with Christian hope. The action formulation is where the migrants learn how to exercise the Christian hope in dealing with their issues. The exodus and revising the witness are where the migrants share their faith with others and how they envisage taking the Christian hope to their future course in life. The excerpts below are vivid examples of the

⁴³³ Joseph Crockett, *Teaching Scripture from an African-American Perspective* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1990), 39.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 44-45.

experiences the interviewees have been through or have witnessed that underline their and their fellow migrants' struggles and faith journeys.

Strategy 1: To identify and describe life experiences in need of Christian hope

Printed

33FP1 had struggled with the divorce of her husband. She feels that the mistake in her decision to marry him was not asking God for direction. "It is all right now but for a long time I blamed myself. The women's stories in the texts I read for this interview opened my eyes and taught me never to give up, to stop feeling sorry for myself, and to have hope that better things will come my way."

43MP2 shared the struggles of one of his fellow migrants who was drunk all the time and used abusive language. "Jesus teaches us to love others even if they are unlovable. I reached out to my friend and pleaded with him to come to church. You will not believe me if I tell you that has changed a lot and is recovering. That is hope my friend. Jesus did the same with the three women in the Bible. He gives me strength to be a good witness," he concluded.

32MP3 had a Hindu migrant friend who had drinking problems and was fooling around with other women even though he was married. 32MP3 invited him for a prayer meeting and shared with him the verse in Ecclesiastics: "You live whatever you want but God will bring you under judgment." The service and the Scripture verse opened his friend's eyes and heart and he accepted Jesus as his savior and gave up his bad ways to glorify the Lord.

38FP4 told me the story of her friend Mary, another migrant worker in Dubai:

Mary was married with children but had been separated from her husband some time back home in India. She developed a relationship with another man while in Dubai. She got pregnant and went back to India and delivered the baby. The baby died because she did not have the means and ability to take care of him. The man, too, left Mary and married another woman. Mary came back to Dubai completely

shattered. I took her to church where she confessed her sins and accepted Jesus as her savior. She is a completely new person now.

40FP5 told me the story of one of her friends who had a lump in her breast.

She was suffering a lot and was in great pain. She desperately needed medication and help. She felt lonely and missed her family and children so much. They were all in India. I shared Christian hope and faith with her. She's coming to church now to see for herself. I think she already feels better.

36MP6 told the story of a friend who was of Hindu background and worshipped idols. "I, too, had many bad habits in my life. I used to worry too much about death. I gave all my worries to God and told him to care of them. I try my best to stay focused and not lose hope. It is difficult but my Lord is faithful and he will help me," he concluded.

Audio

50FA8 said,

My husband had a brain hemorrhage and lost his speech. Things were difficult. We have many cases of sickness and difficulties of different nature among the migrants in the UAE. I miss my family who are in India. I am illiterate and just started to learn how to read and write. Life is difficult, but only Jesus makes it worth living, like the women in the Bible stories. Pray for us please.

55FA9 told the story of a friend who was of Hindu background. "He was suffering from stomach pain as a result of drinking. Like him, we have so many migrants who have different kinds of problems. Only hope in Jesus can help me and help them to continue living this life. God gives us the strength to go on," she said.

43FA10 has been separated from her husband for fifteen years. "I cried for years until there were no more tears left. The divorce was painful for me. My father was sick, and he was a faithful Hindu. Without Jesus how do you think I could still be here. That is my hope. Jesus protects me and gives me reason to live," she explained.

32MA11 said, “I am short tempered. I had drinking problems and used abusive language. My friend Prasad had the same problems. Both of us attended a Bible study group in the labor camp and are working on solving our problems with the help of Jesus. There is no other way, like the women in the Bible stories.”

37MA12 has seen his family only twice in the last ten years. “I feel so homesick and miss my wife and children. I need money so that my family will survive back home and my children to be educated. I have to make this sacrifice for them. In the UAE only the church and my faith hold me together. I have great hope that I will soon be reunited with my family. Nothing is impossible with Jesus.”

Storytelling

42MST18 told the story of his migrant friend who has lost his job and came to stay with him for one and a half month. “I took care of him, and we prayed together. God is great and does miracles. We have to keep connected to him to persevere in our faith and hope that he loves us whatever state we are in.”

25MST17 has a job but the money he earns is hardly sufficient to meet his needs. “I wash and clean cars. One day I slipped and fell and hurt my chest. I was worried as to how serious my problem was. The pastor prayed over me and I was healed. I could not be absent from work. God is great and does great miracles.”

32MST16 met a fellow migrant in the same labor camp who was of Hindu background and not from the same region as him. “My friend had many family problems back home. Moreover, he was suffering from stone problems in his kidney. He was not able to eat food for more than a week. I took him to church with me, the only thing I could do. Like the stories in the Bible, I wanted him to meet Jesus.”

53FST15 has been a Christian all her life. “I can see so many migrants around who are superstitious and idol worshipers. My hope is that the church and I can reach out to these people and bring them to the true faith in Jesus,” she said.

51FST14 told the story of one of her migrant friends who worked as a maid in an Arab family:

The family had a monkey. One day as she was feeding the monkey it attacked her. She ran away from the house without closing the door. The monkey ran away and the landlady beat my friend so harshly that she ran away. My friend managed to purchase a ticket to fly out of Dubai. However, the police arrested her at the airport and there was a court case against her by her employers. I felt so sorry for her, but this is the kind of things we suffer from in this country. She needs faith and hope in Jesus to sustain her in her pain.

50FST13 shared her experiences while ministering to women in labor camps.

A major concern is the migrant women who are involved in prostitution. They are often driven to it through despair and exploitation. I recently met a woman who was crying and felt so lonely. She had no job and had not eaten for some days. I gave her money so that she can buy food. I also prayed with her because she was in a miserable state. At the end of the visit she was convinced that only Jesus could liberate her and give her hope to appreciate her life and to live a better life.

Strategy 2: To describe and act out situations in which hope is needed and applied

Printed

33FP1 feels that being in the church among brothers and sisters and engaging with the message of hope has healed her from the wounds of her divorce. “I am happy at my workplace and feel that this is a blessing from God. Coming to Dubai and having my present job is an answer to many prayers. I am confident that God will do more miracles in my life. I am at peace and am satisfied,” she said.

43MP2 told me how he shared his Christian hope and testimony with his friend and he changed his ways. “This experience encouraged me to share my faith

with my friends in the labor camp. Every day I come across lives changed. Amen,” he said.

32MP3 feels that there is a difference between “my word and God’s Word. When we share God’s Word, it makes a difference. That is why I am committed to reach out to others.”

38FP4 shared the Christian message of hope with a friend. “Mary is a Christian now and is working in Dubai and sending money home to take care of her children she has from her first marriage. I am so happy to see her life change after she decided to follow Jesus,” she said.

40FP5 shared this: “My friend was sick. We all prayed for her and God answered our prayers. She is cured now after finding the proper medication for her. The Word of God not only comforts me and helps me to overcome my loneliness and homesickness but it also empowers me to reach out to others.”

36MP6 shared his faith with a friend and his wife. He said, “They are both Christians now and enjoy God’s grace. I wish I came to know God earlier. I wasted my life because I did not meet Him. I thank God because I do not have any problems that worry me and I am no more afraid of death.”

Audio

50MA7 said,

Two of my friends became Christian after I shared the Message with them. They both stopped their old habits and now attend church regularly. Migrants in the labor camp always fight with each other and have no peace. Just like I found the peace in Christ, I want them to find the same peace, too. That is why I am never shy about my faith and sharing it with others.

50MA7 is sharing his faith with his fellow migrants and because of that many have started to come to church. “I want them to be blessed by God just like I was. They

need hope. When they do not have anything to look forward to their life becomes unbearable,” he concluded.

50FA8 reported that her prayers were answered and that God healed her husband. She said,

The Gospel is so essential for all, especially to the migrants. Without God the migrants will go to bad habits and will remain ignorant. They will perish. God has helped me to take care of my loneliness and homesickness. The same God who is taking care of me in Dubai is also taking care of my family in India. This is why I have peace in my mind. This is what I share with others so that they also seek God.

43FA10 indicated that her father is a new person now after receiving Jesus as his savior. “God has made a miracle in his life and he is a new person now. I, too, have found my own peace in life even though I am separated from my husband. There is nothing I desire except to continue to grow in the Lord who has given me everything. I am fully satisfied,” she concluded.

32MA11 said that he became Christian in Dubai eight months ago. “I know very well what it means to live a godless life. My desire is for all people who were blind like me to come to Christ. I have been sharing my faith with my close friend since the day I became a believer. My friend, his wife and children are all believers now. Like the women in the Bible stories, we should not lose hope but persevere.”

37MA12 believes in the power of prayer. “I raise all my issues to God through prayer. I remember all the good things that God has done for me and the fact that I am who I am by his grace. I thank God for my job, health, wife and children and for the provision that he provides for my family’s sustenance. I am satisfied and all of us are growing in faith in Jesus.”

Storytelling

42MST18 said,

My friend and I have received answers to our prayers. My friend found a job and is thankful to the Lord for his protection. When I listen to migrants' problems and their struggles and hopelessness that gives me the opportunity to share with them stories of hope from the Bible. They listen to the stories with great interest. They connect their story with the Bible stories and this is the reason why it becomes so relevant.

25MST17 is comforted because he has hope that God in His own time will provide him with a better job with a higher income. "I was recently involved in a car accident but God protected me. My accident taught me how great God is. My God is a great healer. No matter what problems I am facing and still will face, God will help me to overcome them," he concluded.

32MST16 shared Bible stories with his friend, and they prayed together for some time. "Baskar is healed from his disease now and became a Christian. He also joined a church and is now back to his village in India. I am so happy that I obeyed God and shared my faith and hope in him with my best friend."

53FST15 believes that "only Jesus can understand us and our problems and can save us. This hope is much needed by the migrants. It is not easy to be a migrant worker. So we have to keep an eye on each other and always talk to them about God and his love. I try to do this as much as I can."

51FST14 said, "The whole church prayed for my friend who was jailed in the monkey case. Finally, the court case was cancelled and she was sent back home to India. Not only her but the whole church's faith was strengthened. Our prayers were answered."

50FST13 can see how some migrant women have stopped practicing prostitution after hearing the Word of God. "The same woman I met and was feeling lonely and hungry started coming to church. The church supported her and she

became Christian. She is back in India now because she does not have a job in UAE. She should have gone home earlier, but she had to meet Jesus in Dubai and then leave.”

Strategy 3: To discuss their views, feelings, and thoughts and what they want to hold on to use in other situations

Printed

33FP1 feels that the Gospel is necessary for the migrants. “Without the Gospel, they will mess up their lives. I will share the Good News with others whenever I can. I cannot keep silent. He has done so much to me,” she said.

43MP2 feels that the message of hope will have a meaning for his life “as long as I live. I am determined to share it with others when I go back home because many have not heard about Jesus and the eternal life he promises. It is my duty.”

32MP3 believes that the Christian message of hope is needed more than money. “When I did not know God, I was in total ignorance and darkness. Now that I know God’s hope, I can see a sense of direction in my life. I want to share this message as long as I live and when I go back home,” he concluded.

38FP4 finds that there are many examples like her friend Mary who need the Christian message of hope for their lives. She believes that “Jesus is alive even today and can solve problems of different kinds. I am determined to share this healing message wherever I am so that people like Mary realize the situation they are in. When you tell people the consequences of a sinful life, they will definitely realize the need to repent and ask for change. It is not only the mistake like the one Mary did that counts. What is important is what Jesus can do by changing people.”

40FP5 wants to share her life testimony “as long as I live. We have to save souls because they are perishing and will go to hell. I have taken one more practical

step in my commitment to Christ by encouraging my son to be fully devoted to Christian ministry. I have dedicated my son for full time Christian ministry.”

36MP6 shared the verse in Mathew 24:40. “This verse challenges me to share my faith wherever I am. I organize prayer meetings in my room in the labor camp where migrants of different cultures and backgrounds attend. I feel it is my duty to tell others about Jesus. I cannot describe to you how happy I become every time one of them commits himself to the savior.”

Audio

50MA7 shares his faith with his fellow migrants on a regular basis and has led many to start attending church services. “I want them to be blessed by God just like I have been blessed. I have two desires in his life: to know more about Jesus and grow in faith and to share this Good News with as many as possible in my life.”

50FA8 indicated that she wants to keep her faith until “I die.” She is equally committed to do God’s work when she goes back to India. “I want to become an evangelist and do God’s work on a full time basis.”

55FA9 wants to share her faith in Dubai and when she goes back to her village in India. As she was crushed by difficulties in the past and Jesus lifted her up, she wants others, too, to enjoy God’s peace. “Why should they suffer when there is Jesus,” she concluded.

43FA10 believes that she wants to experience this faith as long as she lives. “I want to have Jesus and also share my faith with others. I cannot and should not keep silent. God wants me to tell others about him and that is what I want to do.”

32MA11 aims to live “for Jesus throughout my life. I also want to share with people all the great things God has done in my life.”

37MA12 feels that he has a “great burden for the migrants around me. I want to share my faith. I see people who are drunk and ruin their health and their families are suffering at home. I want to see their lives changed here in Dubai. I will do the same when I go back to my village in India,” he concluded.

Storytelling

42MST18 shared his delight at being exposed to the storytelling medium. He wants to get more training in this skill so that he can reach more people. “I am fortunate to be exposed to the storytelling format, and that is why the Bible passages have become more interesting. I want others to be engaged with the Bible texts through storytelling to have more faith.”

25MST17 feels that he is more motivated now to share the Biblical message of hope after being exposed to storytelling. “I want to share these stories with others because God’s Word gives great comfort to all who are in trouble and are suffering. I want to share this hope with others wherever I go.”

32MST16 believes this,

If we talk to people who have difficulties and relate their problems with those of the stories they will respond. There are plenty of opportunities in the labor camps and on buses while commuting back and forth from work, where I share these stories with them. The storytelling sessions the BSG conducted in my labor camp have been great motivation for me as how to share the faith with others. Thank you.

53FST15 regularly goes and visits labor camps with her husband and meets new migrants. “I used to be shy in the past. Now I am bold and have the courage to tell others about Jesus.” She reflected.

51FST14 ministers in a labor camp for women.

I come across women who have so many bad habits: stealing, using bad language, abusing others and still more. Their life is like a kite with the thread cut off and carried away by circumstances. I want to share my faith with them and with many others in my village when I

go back home. The storytelling medium has been an eye opener for me to find out more treasures in the Bible and I want to share these treasures with others in an interesting manner.

50FST13 said that the storytelling medium helped her to grow in confidence and tell others about Jesus. “I want to put Bible stories in mega voice devices and share it with women who have no faith. I want to do this until I die.”

Conclusion

It was interesting to hear that almost all the interviewees, irrespective of their nationalities, languages, and denominations, face the same challenges in their lives. Equally interesting was that their problems seemed to be relatively mitigated by the fact that each linguistic group found “refuge” in its own kind, that is, language group, identity, and culture. Clearly, they preferred to read or hear the Bible in their mother language and attend their own ethnic churches. This crucial finding urges the BSG to continue providing BE tools in the mother language of each church in the UAE thus contributing to spreading the Word of God and the message of hope where it is most needed. Rightly, Fishman believes in what he calls “a continuing ethno-humanistic, ethno-religious and ethno-cultural constellation of beliefs, behaviors and attitudes” that help people to struggle against the materialistic view of a globalized world.⁴³⁶

Even though the interviewees were all Telugus and they all spoke the same language, they interpreted the Scripture message of hope differently. Each migrant had his/her own understanding of Christian hope that seemed to be based on his/her own life circumstances. The way they understood the three Scripture texts and made meaning of them was equally different. Crockett is right when he asserts that the study of the scripture is intentionally and inseparably connected to the personal and

⁴³⁶ Joshua A. Fishman, *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2001), 17.

social activity of God's presence and power.⁴³⁷ The learner has his/her own understanding of the same text when "the Bible is in one hand... and the analysis of a problem is in the other hand."⁴³⁸

The research revealed the importance of Christian hope in the lives of the migrants. The data showed how the migrants are rediscovering themselves as new creatures in Jesus Christ through hope and the direct result of faith in Jesus. The research showed how hope and faith are helping the migrant to navigate through life in the diaspora and when they go back home to India. Howard believes that the Christian spiritual formation helps people to move forward in "conformity and union with Christ."⁴³⁹ It is not only involvement in programs but also about "maturity of life and calling. In this life maturity, individual and communities think, feel and act like Jesus."⁴⁴⁰ The migrants in the UAE are getting more mature in life, and the Christian message of hope is helping them to think, feel, and act like Jesus. In fact, this research showed how these biblical realities are helping each and every one of the migrants to sustain themselves during their difficulties in the UAE. This is after all what the BSG strives to achieve: to instill Christian hope in the hearts of abused, over-worked, and lonely migrant workers so that they would find solace, love, and care in their Savior Jesus Christ.

The research intended to measure the understanding of hope among the Telugu migrant workers; however, the data showed how the interviewees actually

⁴³⁷ Joseph Crockett, *Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as they Engage Scripture Texts* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 43.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Evan B. Howard, "Spiritual and the Meaning of Life," *Common Ground Journal* 7, no. 1 (fall 2009): 20.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

made meanings of the Scriptures above and beyond those the researcher offered (some of these meanings are compiled in Appendix H). They were asked to comment on texts of hope, but many expanded their responses with assertions of faith, discipleship, and training to learn to be story tellers. *Faith* came up constantly during the research process. Several of the interviewees often mentioned faith in Jesus Christ and linked it with hope in Jesus. The data also showed how the migrants have experienced (and still do) a deeper understanding of a theology of the cross, which allows them to treat personal and corporate suffering as a Good Friday experience that is a prelude to the Easter Sunday experience. The testimonies revealed the migrants' past and present experiences and how faith in Jesus keeps them alert and helps them navigate through their myriad problems. For them, God is a miracle maker, He is the God of impossibilities, and He takes care of them, giving them strength, comfort, patience and satisfaction. Their testimonies revealed the importance Telugu culture puts on having a prosperous life, yet their faith and aspiration to honor God have led them to prefer making a decent living and not to resort to illegal, shady dealings to procure money.

No matter how differently the interviewees understood and made meaning of the same text we can see that their lives have been transformed. Clearly, the interviewees' lives had changed, and the message of hope made an enormous impact on their lives. Smallbones argues that no matter how good the teacher performs and how the learner responds, "the transforming power of the Scripture has little to do with these efforts. It is always the gracious work of the Spirit of God within, and often occurs despite the teacher's efforts."⁴⁴¹ Truly, this was a reality for all the

⁴⁴¹Jackie L. Smallbones, "Teaching Bible for Transformation," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (fall 2007): 295.

interviewees, a fact that greatly contributed towards their endurance in foreign and sometimes hostile surroundings. At the same time, this finding underscores the mission of the BSG and indicates the urgency to reach more people with the Good News that is in Jesus who transforms lives and makes them worth living.

An important finding of this research is that all three BE tools are used extensively and almost equally by the interviewees and the churches. In fact, the Lausanne Occasional paper argues that the intention of analyzing the settings for oral and literate approaches should not be in opposition to one another as “it is not a matter of either-or but both-and.”⁴⁴² Indeed, this research demonstrates that the BSG’s three different mediation tools for BE are equally important and that they have an equal impact on people as they fulfill different needs and are utilized in different contexts. This is a significant finding that emphasizes the importance of continuing providing the Scriptures in different formats to reach all, the literate, semi-literate, and illiterate, with the Scriptures as God belongs to all his creatures who have the right to learn about him and his love for them.

However, in no way does this finding serve only as an affirmation of the status quo of the BSG programs. It goes far beyond that. The vast amount of data this research project collected urges the BSG to consider some new directions for the BSG to improve, update and modify its programs if not immediately at least in the near future. For instance, testimonies that interpreted the chosen texts also as stories of faith, a call to action to reach out to others in the Gulf, a call to reach out to others when they returned home, of self-discovery, and a desire to become story tellers themselves, underscore the imperative of further reflection at the BSG to discover

⁴⁴² Lausanne Occasional Paper, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Bangalore: Sudhindra, 2005), 12.

how the BSG can creatively work with such surpluses of meaning to fine tune some of its programs for migrants.

Another important finding of this study is the central role the church is playing in the life of each migrant community. Churches may have different approaches, tools, perspectives, and doctrinal beliefs, but they are all playing a crucial role in engaging the message of Christian hope among their migrant constituencies. Undoubtedly, this finding reaffirms the BSG's mission to partner with all churches and support their ministries among hundreds of multi-lingual, -ethnic, and -denominational congregations. Ballard recognizes this role and argues that the "Bible belongs to the Church. It is constitutive of it and a resource for it. It finds its truth and reality in the worshipping community. It is there that the Bible comes alive."⁴⁴³

The project also revealed that the self-discovery of the migrants is action based. The meaning making of the Scripture read or heard show the multiplying aspect of the interviewees' faith. That is, the interviewees are not keeping the message of hope and faith to themselves but they are sharing it with other fellow migrants. The latter is another surplus meaning that was gathered from the same research. The data collected showed how the migrants want to be trained in storytelling and gain confidence in order to share their faith with others. This was a real eye-opener for the researcher. Stearns believes that "embracing the gospel, or good news, proclaimed by Jesus, is so much more than a private transaction between God and us. Jesus called the resulting new world order 'the kingdom of God' and said that it would become a reality through the lives and deeds of his followers."⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Paul Ballard, "The Scriptures in Church and Pastoral Practice," *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (January 2007): 41.

⁴⁴⁴ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 2-3.

Evidently, the migrants not only embrace the gospel in their own life but also aim to help in furthering the kingdom of God.

Another significant finding is that the Christian mission of engaging the message of hope is not limited to/within the Christian community. It goes far beyond, reaching Hindus and Muslims. This is a very sensitive issue for the BSG; however, we are happy to hear the interviewees' testifying that their testimonies have greatly impacted their fellow Hindu and Muslim workers. Witherup cites the late Pope Paul II and Benedict XVI as advocates of

a new evangelization. Evangelization can fruitfully be directed outwardly to the non-believing world and inwardly to the faithful in need of perpetual reform. But in either case, the mission is carrying Christ forth as a light to the world.⁴⁴⁵

In this respect, what the migrants in the UAE are engaged in is "new evangelization." They are sharing the Gospel of change outwardly with those who are of other faiths and inwardly within their own constituencies for "perpetual reform."

Throughout the interviews with the migrants, I could not help but appreciate their "childlike" faith. Indeed, just like Jesus said, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17). They do not need deep theological analyses or doctrinal debates to find meaning to their lives. They are endowed with a simple faith that gives meaning to their lives, anchors their faith, and empowers them through their many hardships. Rightly, Newton defines faith as a "strong and unshakable belief in something especially without proof or evidence... just trust in God and in his actions and promises."⁴⁴⁶ Clearly, the migrants'

⁴⁴⁵ Ronald D. Witherup, "Paul the Missionary," *The Priest* (October 2008): 20.

⁴⁴⁶ Derek Newton, "Faith, Doubt and Biblical Criticism: Spiritual Survival in the Shifting Sands," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2010): 6.

“childlike” faith is based on something that does not need proof or evidence but trusting fully in God and in his actions.

Future directions

In light of the above findings, the following list enumerates some possible future directions for the BSG:

1. Discipleship: as several interviewees indicated that they had become “new” in Jesus and “changed” by engaging with the Scriptures and their need to “stay focused on Jesus,” “learn to be patient” and “grow in faith”, these suggest that the BSG should take new initiatives in the future in collaboration with the churches to develop discipleship programs for their congregations in biblical knowledge, spiritual nourishment, and means for spreading the Good News.
2. Training: as several interviewees reported how much they enjoyed storytelling and hoped to learn to be story tellers themselves, the BSG, in partnership with the churches in the UAE, will initiate more Simply The Story (STS) workshops not only aimed at the leadership but also to those whose growth in faith and spiritual experiences urge them to share their hope in Jesus with their fellow migrant workers at the workplace or in the labor camps. Equally important is initiating STS workshops in churches that have not yet been exposed to this BE format.
3. Literacy programs: the migrants have the desire to learn how to read and write their mother language, but at the same time many come from non-Christian backgrounds and/or still live in non-Christian milieus. These pose great challenges to the migrants. Literacy programs are designed to teach reading and writing while using the Bible and growing in faith, becoming more knowledgeable, and learning how to evangelize to others. Such a program

will have a lasting impact on the migrants, boost their confidence, and equip them to share their faith, especially when they go back home or to other countries.

4. Further research: the interviews with the pastors revealed the need and importance of providing the Scriptures, printed and audio, in the mother language of each and every community. Their testimonies also highlighted the imperative to develop multilingual outreach programs, such as STS, for few churches reported that they had not been exposed to the storytelling BE format yet. To meet these needs, the BSG needs to embark on a study to assess the linguistic varieties in the different congregations in the UAE and inform churches about the different outreach programs the BSG offers.

To conclude, I would like to share something I read recently on a flight to Dubai. Khouri, a Lebanese journalist, was writing about a bus driver at the Doha airport, reflecting on the migrant driver's dignity and pride in doing his job diligently. He concludes his reflections by saying, "their faith will be rewarded, as was my faith in the indomitable power of the human spirit that day."⁴⁴⁷ Migrants are hardworking people who want to earn their living by doing their job with pride and dignity. They have internalized a childlike, simple faith in Christ, which as the testimonies indicate are all rewarded; otherwise, how can they graciously testify that they are satisfied with what God has provided them with. Needless to say, the migrants' sense of fulfillment despite their misfortunes reaffirmed my faith and multiplied my commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission.

⁴⁴⁷ Rami G. Khouri, "When Dignity Drives a Doha Airport Bus," *The Daily Star Newspaper* (February 2012): 7.

CHAPTER SIX

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

Introduction

This chapter will first deal with the lessons that I learned while doing this study. It will then highlight the three main areas of the ministerial competencies as required and listed in the NYTS handbook. The three main ministerial competencies were formulated together with the Site Team members. The chapter will also deal with the fourth area of competency that needs improvement (again in line with the NYTS handbook). Finally, the chapter will reflect on the testimonies of the Site Team members regarding my qualifications and performances in the areas of ecumenism, witnessing, and administration.

Lessons learnt

As the General Secretary of the BSG for more than two decades now I am used to defining *learning* as “problem solving.” Argyris argues that people “focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment. Solving problems is important. But if learning is to persist, managers and employees must look inward.”⁴⁴⁸ In this respect, this research was a good opportunity for me to look “inward.” I joined this degree program with an attitude of learning and evaluation of the BSG ministry and my ministry. Rightly, Argyris asserts that if people have the right attitude and commitment, learning follows automatically.⁴⁴⁹ The project was an opportunity to focus not only on external, that is, the UAE, socio-economic, political, demographic,

⁴⁴⁸ Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People how to Learn,” *Reflections* 4, no. 2 (2008): 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

and religious factors, but also on internal factors, that is, BSG, BE tools, and my performance. It was a good opportunity to look into my own “behaviors” rather than “that of others.”⁴⁵⁰ For example, the interviews with the migrant workers helped me to understand their real world much better and to appreciate the way they face their myriad challenges. These insights offered me the opportunity to evaluate the BSG ministry and assess its effectiveness in meeting these challenges. Indeed, the interviewees’ accounts showed that BSG’s programs are working effectively, but like all programs they must stand for constant review and scrutiny as circumstances change and the BSG learns more about the communities it serves.

The project was also a good occasion to avoid “defensive reasoning” because the latter can block learning even if the person’s commitment is very high.⁴⁵¹ Argyris indicates that defensive reasoning encourages individuals to keep private the premises, inferences, and conclusions that shape their behavior. For me, the project paved the way to “test” the programs in a truly independent, objective fashion. The research within the Telugu migrant community developed what Argyris calls “productive reasoning”, that is, the ability to connect the program to real business problems: How well is the BSG able to implement its BE programs within the migrant constituencies? How effectively are the same programs impacting the needs and challenges of different groups and ethnic congregations in the UAE? These and other challenges were some of the main connecting themes that I encountered within the “real business.” In this regard, the study offered data that confirms that present programs are working as expected; however, the data also offered the BSG the opportunity to seriously study the data with regard to evaluation and updating. As

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

listed in Chapter Five, the BSG plans to focus and plan programs that target discipleship, training, literacy, and STS, all in collaboration with the churches in the UAE.

Tsoukas believes that in the post-modern organization individuals bring more of themselves, their ideas, and their feelings to their work.⁴⁵² Similarly, Hirschhorn argues that nowadays employees “are more psychologically present.”⁴⁵³ In fact, this research helped me to realize that the challenges and aspirations of the target audience, in this case the Telugu migrant community, should be the essence and driving force behind the BSG programs rather than what is available, namely, funds, manpower, and constant government surveillance which sometimes have their toll on the BSG ministry.

Last, but not least, this project was a real driving force. It was a chance to challenge myself and the BSG to aim for more, improved, and better results. As Tsoukas points out, it is not only important to achieve productive reasoning but also to constantly challenge oneself, expand one’s horizons, and “know thyself.”⁴⁵⁴ The learning process of “knowing thyself” in this research did not necessarily mean only me, the staff, and the BSG. It was more about evaluating and enhancing the core values of the ministry program, the procedures through which they need to be implemented, and the context in which we need to develop them.

⁴⁵² Haridimos Tsoukas, “Commentary-Vulnerability, Moral Responsibility, and Reflexive Thinking,” *Reflections* 4, no. 2 (2008): 15.

⁴⁵³ Larry Hirschhorn, *Reworking Authority* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

⁴⁵⁴ Tsoukas, “Commentary - Vulnerability, Moral Responsibility, and Reflexive Thinking,” 15.

Ministerial competencies

In consultation with the members of the Site Team, the following ministerial competencies were identified: ecumenism, witness/evangelist, and administrator. The Site team members assessed these three qualifications in the candidate and ranked them as CONTINUE. Below is a detailed explanation of these three competencies.

Ecumenism: ministerial competency for Goal 3

The UBS is an inter-confessional organization whose mandate is to serve and support the ministry of all churches. In this respect, working ecumenically has been an important aspect in my ministry involvement with the Bible Society. In reality, my personal ecumenical journey started when I was employed by the Bible Society in Lebanon in 1980. Before then, as His Holiness Catholicos Aram I writes, reflecting on his early years, “Ecumenism was a sort of academic interest.”⁴⁵⁵ It was an understanding which was found more in the books rather than in real life. As I started getting involved in inter-church relations, ecumenism “became a way of life, a quality of being Christian in the world today.”⁴⁵⁶ I am still faithful to this “way of life” in the Gulf countries, where the BSG works within multi -national, -ethnic, and -linguistic communities and denominations. My 30-year-long experiences have equipped and trained me to deal with and learn to respect the cultural and denominational traditions of each and every church and language group.

His Holiness Aram I writes, “Ecumenism is an opening to the other.”⁴⁵⁷ My ecumenical relationships increased my knowledge of the cultural and social habits of different traditions and confirmed my conviction about the importance of working in

⁴⁵⁵ Aram I, *In Search of Ecumenical Vision* (Antelias, Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 2000), 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

and for diverse groups, something which enhanced “existential dialogue” in me.⁴⁵⁸ I came to know that each church is equally important and that the existence of each one of them is crucial for ministry and mission in the bigger Christian perspective. These characteristics emerge prominently during my regular and constant visits and meetings with the leaders, fathers, priests, canons, and pastors of myriad church traditions in the UAE, ranging from Anglican to Assyrian, Baptist, Charismatic, Eastern Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Maronite, Mar Thoma, Methodist, Oriental Orthodox, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, and many more.

The third characteristic of ecumenism His Holiness Aram I lists is that ecumenism is a “learning process.”⁴⁵⁹ On many occasions, the BSG has been a platform for churches of various denominations to come together for common functions, such as, festivals, celebrations, seminars, Bible distribution projects, youth retreats, and children’s ministries. In this respect, the BSG has fostered dialogue and provided opportunities for different church communities to come together for services, Bible Day celebrations, and spiritual seminars. The latter is a real life experience which, in many ways, is not that easy to organize, handle, or deal with. Having said that, it is an experience which illustrates two important aspects of ecumenism: first, whereby churches and communities in this process are mutually challenged; second, it helps Christians in their “pilgrimage towards unity.”⁴⁶⁰ Hence, my learning process has been a positive, encouraging experience that has paved the way for fruitful, successful, and brotherly relationships and partnerships.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

This project confirmed one more time that ecumenism is indeed a way of life. As I interviewed various church leaders and migrants from different denominations, I realized once more how it is important to live with and accept the Other. This same Other is equally important and adds greatly on building values for humankind and to nurture and foster co-existence and understanding one another. Rightly, the Armenian Catholicos asserts that the Christian church cannot and should not remain indifferent to the alienation of humanity from God and the imperatives of the Gospel. He believes and I agree with him that despite their theological, ecclesiological and doctrinal divergences, and ethnic and cultural diversities the churches must work together.⁴⁶¹ The BSG is committed to its strategy of working ecumenically with all the different Christian Churches and developing mission and ministry programs where churches can come together to create a bigger impact, set an example of fellowship, and strengthen Christian witness in a Muslim milieu, all for the service of the big migrant communities in the region. Needless to say, the migrant communities in the UAE have common challenges that all churches can and need to be involved in with collective efforts.

Witness/Evangelist: ministerial competency for Goal 1

As a Bible Society leader, I was trained not only to distribute the Bible but also to help the community to read and understand the message of the Bible. The latter has been a crucial feature of my ministry of spreading the Good News within the church community, in the labor camps, farms, safe houses, and prisons. The various Scripture engagement avenues that the BSG developed over the years - printed, AV, and Storytelling - have been instrumental in witnessing to the communities in the Gulf. Doghramji asserts “the Good News of Christ is not a book

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 46.

but living Word of God manifested in his life and teaching.”⁴⁶² The BSG ministry to the migrants in particular has been one of those main “welcoming” acts where “others” (migrants who have been alienated from the community) have been cared for, catered to, and engaged with the message of hope in a Muslim country where witnessing is prohibited and witnesses punished severely when caught. Needless to say that constant police surveillance is a life-threatening reality. Such a restricted, intimidating context is a continuous challenge for me as the General Secretary of the whole operation in the Gulf but one that has multiplied my faith, strengthened my witness, and taught me to trust the Lord. This research and the data gathered reconfirmed my belief in the vital role of witnessing the living Word of God.

Administrator: ministerial competency for Goal 2

The BSG serves seven countries, a unique, matchless case in the UBS. As the General Secretary, I have been directly involved in defining not only the mission and the business goals of each country but also in drawing up the overall strategy for the entire Gulf region. Prior to my assignment in the Gulf, I was very much involved in organizing and developing the Bible Society ministry in Lebanon and Syria. At the same time, for six years, I assisted in the development of the Bible work in the former Soviet Union countries and Iran. Having such a broad experience in administration and leadership in various contexts, I agree with Habecker who believes that the models of leading and following which come to us from the Scripture are not only timeless, they are without geographical boundary.⁴⁶³ A Christian leader/administrator needs to incorporate leadership and administrative values from and within their

⁴⁶² Peter Doghramji, *In Other Words* (Englewood, NJ: Print Solutions, 2004), 308.

⁴⁶³ Eugene B. Habecker, *Rediscovering the Soul of Leadership* (Wheaton: Victor books, 1996), 8.

public, private or personal, and inner lifestyles to achieve a workable unity, affirm values, envision goals, explain, manage, motivate, renew, represent the group, and serve as a symbol.⁴⁶⁴

These tasks make up the soul of leadership. In this respect, it is important for Christian administrators and leaders not to lose the soul of leadership that germinates in and from the Bible. If leaders and administrators move away from the biblical claims, they “move independent of the necessity of being in tune and in touch with the Holy Spirit of God.”⁴⁶⁵ Delegating assignments, fundraising, initiating and implementing new strategies and software packages, maintaining smooth relations with countless Christian denominations, managing the budget, multi-tasking, organizing and chairing staff and Board meetings, overseeing projects, prioritizing, recruiting, supervising more than 20 outlets, and writing regular reports to donors are some of my administrative responsibilities in the BSG. Good time management and meticulous organization, I believe, have been at the core of the smooth-running of the entire operation in the Gulf. I can only praise the Lord and thank Him for these gifts.

Religious Educator: fourth ministerial competency

Religious Educator is the fourth ministerial competency. Members of the Site Team labeled it as DEVELOP.

As explained throughout this study, the Gulf is a unique region with unique demographic, social, and religious setups. I have always been cautious in my relationships with the myriad church denominations and their diverse leaders. My strategy has been to maintain balanced, not very close yet not very distant, relations with all. I have on several occasions made speeches during inauguration or farewell

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 20-26.

⁴⁶⁵ Habecker, *Rediscovering the Soul of Leadership*, 10.

services, given presentations on the ministry and mission of the BSG, offered condolences, and welcomed new clergy. However, I have always thought it wise, for example, not to be the main speaker at a seminar organized by the BSG or a church spiritual retreat in order not to create sensitivities that might have repercussions on the work of the BSG. Rightly, the author of Hebrews says, “Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity.”⁴⁶⁶ Doghramji explains this verse by saying that as part of our Christian upbringing and education certain teachings about Christ must be left behind; nevertheless, it is crucial to go to the next phase that is that of maturity. He believes, and I agree with him, that Christians should outgrow their primary education and have a more mature understanding of Christ.⁴⁶⁷

Strategy: I will engage in the study of relevant literature and look for opportunities for more maturity

Reflections from Site Team members

The members of the Site Team of this project reflected on my ministerial competencies in the areas of ecumenism, witnessing, and administration in my capacity as both General Secretary of the BSG and as researcher and had this to say:

Ecumenism

Rev. Dr. Ernest Victor said, “As General Secretary for the Bible Society in the Gulf, I have found Hrayr Jebejian at ease in networking with the ecumenical and evangelical churches. He is unbelievably comfortable at doing this.”

Babu Ganta said, “Hrayr Jebejian wanted to choose individuals from different denominations in order to get a good representation from the spectrum of the Telugu

⁴⁶⁶ *New International Version* (Colorado: Biblica, 2011), Hebrews 6:1.

⁴⁶⁷ Doghramji, *In Other Words*, 283.

churches in the UAE. He planned his time well in order to spend adequate time with each interviewee. The selection of individuals reflects the ecumenical knowledge and experiences of Hrayr Jebejian.”

Rev. Canon Stephen Wright said, “He visits pastors of different church denominations and chats with them happily about the work of the Bible Society, the needs of their congregations, and the challenges of their ministries in order to cater to their wants and to strengthen the Christian community as a whole.”

Witness/Evangelist

Rev. Dr. Ernest Victor said, “I have reports and letters from church leaders that show that Hrayr Jebejian has a passion to witness and is wholeheartedly involved in taking the Gospel to unreached groups.”

Babu Ganta said, “The research with the migrants has given Hrayr Jebejian a great opportunity to closely observe the impact of God’s Word on the lives of the migrant workers. As I observed men and women sharing with Hrayr their experiences of how they have been impacted by the Word, his face grew red with shock and wonder at seeing the faith level of these illiterate and semi-literate people. Their observations of spiritual treasures from the Bible passages were as deep if not deeper than many theologians could find.”

Rev. Canon Stephen Wright said, “His work seeks to strengthen Christians in their faith, openly working with government officials in courteous ways to give a good witness for the Christian community in this Muslim country. If he did this in insensitive ways, they would never again grant him visa to come to this country.”

Administrator

Rev. Dr. Ernest Victor said, “He is an accomplished administrator. I am 100% sure he deserves this cardinal qualification to run the Bible Society in the Gulf.”

Mr. Babu Ganta said, “Hrayr Jebejian has had a glimpse into the lives of those interviewed, and it has been a wonderful experience for those interviewed. Some were in tears of joy seeing an educated big officer taking time to listen to their stories and to appreciate and wonder at God’s hand at work in their lives.”

Rev. Canon Stephen Wright said, “I work more closely with Hrayr’s colleagues. They speak very well of him, underlining his efficiency in chairing meetings, delegating tasks, keeping track of projects and reports, and overseeing the accounts.”

Conclusion

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. Press on toward the goal for the prize upward call of God in Christ Jesus.⁴⁶⁸

This verse from Philippians has been the driving force in my life. Right from the early days of the civil war in Lebanon and during all the conflicts in the Arab world Paul’s letter has been a reminder to me to “press on” and reach the goal irrespective of my social, economic, and political contexts. In this respect, this project has been yet another driving force for me to stay focused and to move forward in helping people to embrace the call of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

⁴⁶⁸ *English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2007), Philippians 3:12-14.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

ENGAGING THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE OF HOPE AMONG
TELUGUMIGRANT WORKERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

By

HRAYR JEBEJIAN

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

2012

Challenge Statement

With oil exploration and drilling expanding in the United Arab Emirates in the 1960s, the need for migrant workers escalated. The migrants' socio-economic and spiritual situation has been very difficult since then. The challenge the Bible Society in the Gulf struggles with is: How can biblical hope be conveyed to the migrants who come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and who look for different Scripture formats so that they can sustain their faith in their daily challenges in the UAE?

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING	1
CHAPTER 2 PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS	8
CHAPTER 3 PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION	13
CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	18
CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION PROCESS	19
CHAPTER 6 MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES.....	20
APPENDICES	23
APPENDIX A TIMLELINE	24
APPENDIX B BUDGET	25
APPENDIX C QUESTIONS USED DURING THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS .	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

The Arabian Gulf is located in western Asia between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. It is an extension of the Indian Ocean.¹ Historically and internationally known as the Persian Gulf, this body of water is sometimes controversially referred to as the Arabian Gulf or simply the Gulf by most Arab States.² The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose member states are the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was founded in Abu Dhabi in 1981. The GCC seeks to foster peace and security in the region as well as economic integration among the member states. In foreign policy terms, the GCC has become a strong important voice in the Arab world.³ The official language in all the GCC countries is Arabic and the religion is Islam. The headquarters of the GCC is in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The UAE is situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia on the Gulf. It is a federation of seven Emirates, each governed by an emir with a single national president. The seven emirates are: Abu Dhabi (capital city), Dubai, Ajman, Sharjah, Ras El Khaimah, Um Al Quain and Fujairah. The total population according to the 2010 official census is 8,264,000, where almost 88.5% are expatriates. The migrant labor force constitutes 42.5% of the expatriate community

¹ United Nations Group of experts on Geographical names. Working Paper no 61. 23rd session, Vienna, 28 March - 4 April 2006, accessed October 9, 2010.

² Niussha Boghrati. "Omission of Persian Gulf name angers Iran." www.worldpress.com. December 28, 2006.

³ Gulf Cooperation Council - Deutsch Federal Foreign Office. Retrieved 31 August, 2012.

and 40% of the total population in the UAE.⁴ The Christian churches are officially recognized by the local authorities. The latter provide the land to the Christian community so that they can have their buildings, provided that the activities are limited within that compound. There is no indigenous local Emirati Christian presence in the country. The Christian church is expatriate and includes many denominations like the Catholics, Greek, Russian and Indian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Anglican, Coptic, Mar Thoma, Evangelical and non-denominational churches that are officially recognized by the authorities.

Each denomination has its land and buildings provided by the government and free of any financial obligations. Nevertheless, the land always remains the possession of the local authorities, and the churches have no claim over it. Each denomination hosts various congregations within its compound who otherwise cannot be recognized or exist in the UAE. According to unofficial statistics, more than 150 different language and ethnic groups exist in the UAE. The Evangelical Church, which is closely connected with the Evangelical Alliance Mission in the US, provides medical services by running one of the main hospitals in the country, Oasis Hospital in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi. By law evangelization is considered a crime and the Christian community is asked to refrain from such activities.

The Catholic Church constitutes the biggest Christian community in the UAE. There is no official census in relation to the Christian presence in the country. The popular belief is that there are almost one million Catholics and the remaining denominations count up to 250,000 to 300,000. The numbers are all approximate and taken from church sources. It is also rather difficult to keep a proper track of the number of Christians as people constantly flock back and forth.

⁴ Trends in International Migrant stock, United Nations, Operation World 7th edition, and the CIA World Factbook.

The Bible Society in the Gulf (BSG) has been present in the UAE with premises and registration since 2000. It aims to support the ministry of all the churches by providing Scriptures in the language they understand and at the price they can afford. As Islam is the official religion and the Christian presence has a number of restrictions, our primary challenge is to secure a constant availability of Scriptures at all times. It is of high importance to make sure that Scriptures in different formats are available to the community for all their programs. Being an inter-confessional organization, the BSG aims to work with all the different church traditions and makes sure to support each and every one of them in their various functions. Bible Engagement is one of the most important programs where the BSG develops various programs to help people to interact with the Scriptures particularly the migrant population which constitutes a big number of the expatriate community. The expatriate community is recognized as all those who are non UAE nationals and who come from different parts of the world for employment. Expatriates can be employed as professional doctors, engineers, business entrepreneurs and others. Migrant laborers are also non UAE nationals and are part of the expatriate population but are employed as domestic helpers, in factories, construction sites, farms and many similar low skilled and low paid jobs. It should also be noted that these expatriate and migrant communities can remain in the UAE as long as they have valid employment and work/business contracts. Neither expatriates nor migrant laborers, though, can ever become citizens of the country.

Migrant workers in the UAE come from Asia and Africa. On arrival, their passports are taken by their employers. The men are primarily involved in construction sites, and they risk injury and even death as they work in temperatures that sometimes touch 50 degrees centigrade. At the end of the day, many return to

crowded, cramped accommodations in vast camps known as labor camps usually on the outskirts of the cities. Most of them are illiterate and their salaries low, but back in their home countries the dream of striking it rich in the Gulf holds a powerful appeal for young Asian and African men and women looking to better their circumstances and those of their families.

Their living conditions are difficult with no proper medical and hygienic care. Their salaries range between USD150 to 200 a month and many do not receive the amount on time. Thousands of workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries are building the infrastructure of Saadiyat Island, for example, a US\$27 billion development which will host branches of the Louvre and the Guggenheim museums, a campus of New York University (NYU), and other institutions. Human Rights Watch documented how these migrants pay unlawful recruiting fees that leave them heavily indebted and are forced to sign contracts on much worse terms, like “slaves building monuments”.⁵ UAE laws do not protect rights to form unions, bargain collectively, or strike. Instead, the UAE's sponsorship system gives employers nearly absolute control over the workers' lawful presence in the country, with visas tied to individual employers who typically confiscate migrant workers' passports. These conditions mean that workers have little recourse against agencies or employers who exploit them.

The UAE is branded as the least friendly nation for expat workers according to findings by *Forbes*. Many migrant workers end up committing suicide as they cannot take the misery any longer. Reporting a Dubai psychiatrist's explanation of the suicide of a worker whose employer had withheld his wages and refused to give him money for medical treatment, Keane writes,

⁵ “Dubai's Skyscraper stained by the blood of migrant Workers.”
www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/may/27/Dubai-migrant-workers-deaths (2011).

When those workers reach here and they realize what they have gotten themselves into and see that they've lost everything, they react to it. They feel trapped as they now know they can't go back either. There's no escape. They know that they are in a bonded labor type of situation and are reacting to what they think is the biggest mistake in their life, an irreparable loss. It is the reaction to this loss which can lead to suicidal contemplation.⁶

84 suicide cases among migrant workers were recorded in 2005; whereas, in 2004 there were 70 cases only.⁷ In May 2011, Athiraman Kannon, a 32-year-old Indian foreman, jumped to his death from the 147th floor of the Burj Al Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Local media reported that Kannan jumped after his employer had denied granting him leave to go home. His death was the 26th known suicide by an Indian worker in the UAE in 2011.⁸ The reports provided by the police in Dubai draw a grimmer picture, reporting 113 suicide cases in 2009.⁹

Many more suffer from depression and various addictions. Many female domestic workers in the UAE suffer because of unpaid wages, food deprivation, long working hours, forced confinement and physical, sexual abuse.¹⁰ Maids who are subject to physical abuse run away from their household with no money and passport. They seek refuge in safe houses where they stay while their cases are being handled

⁶ David Keane and Nicolas McGeehan, "Enforcing Migrant Worker's Rights in UAE." *International Journal on Minority and Group* (2008), 111.

⁷ Jessica Caplin, "Mirage in the Desert Oasis." *World in Review, Harvard International Review* (Winter 2009), 30.

⁸ "Dubai's Skyscraper stained by the blood of migrant Workers" 2011. www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/may/27/Dubai-migrant-workers-deaths (2011).

⁹ ITUC Report, "Hidden frames of the Gulf rivals. International Trade Union Congress, Brussels, Belgium." www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/VS_QatarEN.final.pdf (2011).

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch World Report, "World Report UAE." www.hrw.org/world-report/world-report-2012-united-arab-emirate (2012).

by their respective embassies or non-government agencies. 91 house maid abuse incidents were recorded in the UAE in 2011.¹¹

Bishop Paul Hinder, the apostolic vicar for Arabia, is responsible for the pastoral care of Catholics in the UAE, Oman and Yemen. This is how he described the situation after the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in the Vatican (2010):

There are more than 2 million Filipinos in the region and about 80 percent of them are Catholic. There are also tens of thousands of Catholics from India, Sri Lanka and Africa. Given that situation, I think the Synod was too focused on the classical Oriental churches in the Middle East and on problems facing the region's native Christians because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Iraq and the continuing tensions in Lebanon and Egypt. The church cannot distinguish between first- and second-class Catholics by downplaying the needs of the millions of Catholic migrant workers in the region. The situation is urgent because in too many places the migrant workers, especially the women, are treated as slaves, not just in the Arabian Peninsula, but in Lebanon and Israel as well.

The churches and the para-church organizations, including the BSG, render their programs to help this big number of migrant workers by providing food, clothing, medical assistance, help in repatriation if need be and Scriptures. As the Bible Society is an inter-confessional organization and works with all the churches of various denominations and ethnic groups, its primary function is to help these different communities in obtaining and engaging with the Scriptures in the format that they understand and appreciate. This project will deal with this very important phenomenon as to how different church denominations and language groups make use and acquire the Scriptures in different formats provided by the Bible Society for their ministry among their migrant workers. The project will also highlight and explore the impact of the Christian message of hope on one sector of the UAE community, namely, the migrants.

¹¹ Sofoh H.Hassane and Abdullah Sief Abdullah, "Exploring the most Prevalent Social Problems in the United Arab Emirates." *International Journal of Academic Research* 3, no. 2 (March 2013), 20.

The case study will be the Indian diaspora community in the UAE and the target audience the Telugus. As Vora argues, “The varying experiences, subjectivities, and forms of belonging among and between different groups of Indians in Dubai highlight the difficulty in studying diasporas as bounded socio-cultural units.”¹² In this respect, the project will try to draw a parallel and measure the impact of the Biblical message of hope on the Telugu migrant diaspora which is “bounded not only by identity and nationality, but rather by migration to Dubai (and the rest of the UAE) and the experiences of living there”.¹³

¹² Vora, Neha. “Producing Diasporas and Globalization: Indian Middle-Class Migrants in Dubai”. *Anthropology Quarterly*, volume 81, number 2, Spring 2008, 402.

¹³ *Ibid*, 403.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

With oil exploration and drilling expanding in the UAE in the 60s and exploding in the 70s the need for migrant workers escalated. Waves of migration from various Asian and African countries took place to tap into the economic boom. Among those Asians and Africans were also Christians who brought their languages, cultures, Christian traditions and worship styles. Multiple congregations began to be established primarily in the bigger urban centers or where there were large enclaves of Asian and other ethnic migrant and expatriate Christians. The largest group of Christians in the UAE is the South Asians with the predominance being Indian Christians. Most South Asians worship in their own mother tongue: Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Nepali, etc.¹⁴ Grimes states that, “Globally, mother tongue has been crucial to impact unreached peoples and to develop disciples and churches.”¹⁵ In order to ensure transmittance of cultural values and pride in their heritage and identity some congregations offer weekly mother tongue language instruction for their Gulf-born children of their families.¹⁶

To illustrate, when Dinesh took a job as caretaker at the BSG’s new Jabal Ali Center, Dubai, in 2003, he could not have been aware how dramatically his life was going to change. As well as being a Christian, he is now actively involved in a

¹⁴ T.V. Thomas, “South Asian Diaspora Christianity in the Persian Gulf.” Christian and Missionary Alliance and Center for Evangelism and World Mission, Regina, Canada, (2012), 7.

¹⁵ Barbara F. Grimes, “From Every Language.” In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library: 2009), 87.

¹⁶ T.V. Thomas, “South Asian Diaspora Christianity in the Persian Gulf.” Christian and Missionary Alliance and Center for Evangelism and World Mission, Regina, Canada, (2012), 8.

ministry which helps people in need in Nepal, his hometown. Dinesh is a Hindu and his first encounter with faith came through reading a Nepali Bible in the BSG Resource Center. He started reading the Bible in his own language and became a Christian. Dinesh started looking for a Nepali church to join. “I asked God to help me find a Nepali church, but I ended up helping to start one,” he explains. The church has grown so rapidly that it has now bought a minibus that goes around the labor camps collecting people who want to come to the service. And it is not just in the UAE that the Nepali congregation is putting its faith into action. It is also developing a ministry back in Nepal by sending missionaries from their church in the UAE to Nepal.

Satyavathi is another example. She is 40 years old and has worked in the UAE for 20 years. She has spent most of those 20 years separated from her husband, three children and grandchild. Her 3 children are now aged 23, 15 and 10. She had to leave the younger 2 when they were just 4 months old so she could return to work. At 17 she had her first child. She is now a grandmother to a 6-year-old. In her absence, her husband tricked her out of her 7,000 rupees savings. Satyavathi is illiterate, so it was easy for her husband to forge the transaction. She and her husband are now divorcing. Satyavathi knows that she has made a better life for her children. “I know I have given my children a better life because of my sacrifice,” she says. The strength of Satyavathi’s sacrifice comes from the Scriptures. She has a calendar of Bible verses above her bed that she cannot read. Even though she does not know what they say, she is comforted by having God’s Word near her. She has a tape recorder and cassettes of Bible verses and encouragement provided by the BSG. “God’s Word gives me comfort and strength,” she says.

Also, the BSG conducts training seminars to church leaders and equips them with the knowledge and skills of storytelling. Those who are trained, then go to the

ministry field and engage the migrant communities with the message of the Bible.

Srun Garam, from the Telugu Church, had this to say after receiving the STS training:

“The Telugu community is one of the biggest communities in the Gulf.

Unfortunately, many of them are illiterate. Simply The Story workshops helped me to improve my skills to share the Gospel message in a very simple way within my community of migrant workers.”

Actually, the story format is how Jesus chose to teach the Word to people of all ages. Stories are refreshing, easily remembered and shared with others.

According to Dewey, in the shared reality of the narrative “teller and audience came together as community to meet the risen Christ.”¹⁷ He believes that story telling welcomes “the insights of socio-political analysis and other approaches to the texts that attempt to understand them in their fullness and not as mere historical or scientific truth.”¹⁸ The Network of Biblical Story Tellers understands biblical story telling as “a means of inclusion in community, an understanding of evangelism as welcoming outsiders into a storied fellowship that is engaged in this activity as a spiritual discipline for the strengthening of relationships in the body of Christ.”¹⁹ Story telling is an oral culture that travels easily from person to person and generation to generation.

The aim of this project is also to evaluate the effectiveness of three Bible Engagement programs: printed, Story Telling and AV. The project will focus on the Telugu community, as around 65% of the Asian migrant community in the UAE

¹⁷ Dennis Dewey, “Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation.” www.dennisdewey.org (2006), 1.

¹⁸ Dennis Dewey, “Performing the Living Word: Learnings from a Storytelling Vocation.” www.dennisdewey.org (2006), 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

comes from South Asia.²⁰ Telugu is one of the main languages within the South Asian community. 30-40% of the Telugu migrant community is illiterate.²¹ In August 2012, the BSG, in cooperation and partnership with the Telugu Church, initiated the Word-Centered Gulf Telugu Christian Conference. The experience will be repeated in the future with more conferences among various Telugu churches. The cooperation with the Telugu churches has encouraged my colleagues and me to evaluate the impact of the Scripture message of hope on the big Telugu migrant community in the UAE. The Indian community (migrants and expatriates) is around 1.75 million people in UAE. ²²According to recent information and statistics obtained from the Indian consulate in the UAE, it is the largest expatriate community in the country. “It uniquely provides a breadth in terms of numbers and depth in terms of categories of workers employed which distinguishes it from every other expatriate community in the UAE”. ²³ The language and ethnic composition as well as jobs occupied among the Indian expatriate community are as follows: 50% of the Indian expatriate community comes from Kerala (Malayalam). 15% from Tamil, 10% from Andhra Pradesh (Telugu), 8% Punjab and 12% from other parts of India (Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa). 65% of the Indian expatriate community is involved in what the embassy names as “blue-collar” jobs, i.e., migrant laborers, who are work on construction sites and agricultural farms. 20% are employed in “white-collar” jobs: clerical staff, sales men, accountants and 15% as professionals. Most, if not all of the Telugu, are employed in “blue-collar” jobs. The Indian embassy statistics also

²⁰ Jessica Caplin, “Mirage in the Desert Oasis.” *World in Review, Harvard International Review* (Winter 2009), 29.

²¹ T. V. Thomas, “South Asian Diaspora Christianity in the Persian Gulf.” *Christian and Missionary Alliance and Center for Evangelism and World Mission, Regina, Canada*, (2012), 18.

²² Gulfnews.com.Al Nisr publishing LLC, January 14, 2013. (Retrieved on January 14, 2013).

²³ Embassy of India. <http://uae.indians.org>. (Retrieved on January 14, 2013).

indicate that some of the Kerala and Tamil people are also involved in “blue-collar” jobs.²⁴

²⁴ Embassy of India. <http://uae.indians.org>. (Retrieved on January 14, 2013).

CHAPTER 3 PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Reading comprehension is defined as “a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement in written language.”²⁵ The author categorizes the three elements in this process: the reader, the text and the activity or purpose of reading. Snow states that “these elements are interrelated in reading comprehension and interrelationship that occurs within a larger socio-cultural context that shapes and is shaped by the reader and that interacts with each of the elements interactively throughout the process of reading.”²⁶ Similarly, it is stated that “all readings are culturally located and therefore on that basis equal methodologically.”²⁷ Blount also comments that “meaningful interpretation is an interaction between the culturally situated contexts of the interpreter and the polysemous meaning potentials of the text.”²⁸ For Iser, a literary work has two poles: the aesthetic and the artistic. The artistic pole is the author’s text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. Miall and Kuiken believe that

Almost no professional attention is being paid to the ordinary reader, who continues to read for the pleasure of understanding the world of the texts rather than for the development of a deconstructive or historicist perspectives. The concerns that an ordinary reader seems likely to have about a literary text, such as its style, its narrative structure, or the reader’s relation to the author, the impact on the

²⁵ Catherine Snow, *Reading for Understanding, toward an R and D program*. (US: Department of Education: 2002), 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Bryan K. Blount, *Can I get a witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press: 2005), 6.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

readers' understanding or feelings - such concerns now seem of little interest.²⁹

In this respect, this project will attempt to assess as to how the Telugu migrant workers will read and make meaning of the Biblical message of hope in their own language and through their cultural perspective and how it can/will help them to sustain the challenges they face in their diaspora context.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: To increase and measure the Telugu migrant awareness of hope from its present expression in their lives to one defined by Find, Save and Authority.

Biblical verse: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living," 2 Timothy 3:16.

Strategy 1: Discovering plural meanings of hope to the Telugu migrant workers.

Strategy 2: Interact with the three Bible stories to explore dimensions of Christian hope. (Jesus finds, saves and has authority)

Strategy 3: Comparing and contrasting and evaluating their original views of hope with Biblical aspects of hope (where Jesus finds, saves and has authority).

Goal 2: To measure the effectiveness of different forms of Bible mediation by making similarities and differences in the Telugu use of printed, audio and storytelling formats.

Biblical verse: "For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then, it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see?" Romans 8: 24.

Strategy 1: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 1: Read, reflect and document understandings of the Biblical narrative read.

²⁹ Miall, David and Kuiken, Don. "The Form of Reading: Empirical Studies of Literariness State." *Poetic* 25, (1998): 327.

Strategy 2: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 2: listen, reflect and document understandings of the Biblical narrative heard.

Strategy 3: Working with Telugu migrant workers group 3: listen, reflect and document understandings of the Biblical narrative performed through storytelling.

Goal 3: To increase in measureable ways the application of Christian hope to Telugu migrant workers' current life experiences.

Biblical verse: "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint," Isaiah 40:31.

Strategy 1: To identify and describe life experiences in need of Christian hope.

Strategy 2: To describe and act out situations in which hope is needed and applied.

Strategy 3: To discuss the views and feelings and thoughts about that activity and what they want to hold on to use in other situations.

Research Area

The research area will focus on the Telugu migrant community in the UAE. The Biblical texts will focus on three main platforms of Christian hope where Jesus seeks, heals/saves, has authority over the Telugu migrant workers. In this concept, the study will be divided into 3 main headings/3 parables/texts

1. Christian hope: Jesus Finds the Telugu migrant - Luke 13:10-17
2. Christian hope: Jesus Heals/Saves the Telugu migrant – Luke 8:40-48
3. Christian hope: Jesus has Authority/Leads and protects the Telugu migrant – Matthew 15:21-28

These stories are chosen to investigate the way Telugu migrant workers react to the basics of Christian faith as illustrated by the hope that the Bible provides in the reality that Jesus Finds, Saves and Leads a person including the migrant.

The research will include semi-structured interviews with 20-55-year-old Telugu migrant workers from three different Telugu churches in the UAE. As three different formats of the Scriptures will be used, six participants will be interviewed for each format. They will all use the same texts but presented in three different formats: the printed text, audio and storytelling for the literate, semi-literate and illiterate men and women respectively.

Five church leaders/clergies of different denominations and language groups will also be interviewed. The latter will help illustrate as to how churches of different denominations and language groups are in need and make use of the Bible mediation tools while they engage the Christian message of hope in their ministry among their migrant constituencies. The research among the different church traditions will also help as to what tools/formats/contents are used more effectively in their outreach ministry and what the main focus/emphasis is in their Bible mediations. The pastors of the three Telugu churches will also be interviewed to find out how the three formats of the Bible texts are used to help the migrants make meaning of the Christian message of hope.

Plan

Group 1: Literate, will use printed book

Group 2: Illiterate, will use audio

Group 3: Literate and illiterate, will use story telling

Each group will study, hear and observe the three Biblical texts in three consecutive sessions (one text at each session for 1 hour). Hrayr Jebejian and Babu Ganta (member of the Site Team) will lead the sessions. Hrayr Jebejian will do personal interviews with each migrant from each group right after the three sessions of each group. The research will probably be conducted during April 2013.

Group 4: The research will be done among five church leaders coming from Catholic (Filipino language group), Ethiopian Orthodox (Amharic), Urdu Evangelical (Pakistani group), Coptic orthodox (Arabic) and Anglican (mainly Tamil speaking group).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Question for Goal 1: (Biblical hermeneutical): How do the Telugu migrant laborers in the UAE read, listen (audio, storytelling) and understand the Christian message of hope (as illustrated in the texts that Jesus finds, saves and has authority), in relation to hope within their own inventory of cultural, familial, institutional life experiences in general, through their ethnic language and culture and in their diaspora context?

Details of the set of questions are included in Appendix C.

Question for Goal 2: (practical methodology) How do Telugu migrants mediate the meaning of the Biblical texts of Christian hope through the printed, audio and storytelling formats and how does it help them in their challenges? Details of the set of questions are included in Appendix C.

Question for Goal 3: (Socio-economic: change nurtured and sustained) How can Biblical faith help migrants to endure their present and future socio-economic pressures in the UAE and when they return home? Details of the set of questions are included in Appendix C.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION PROCESS

Goal 1:

Method: Data is collected as to how meaning is made

Evaluation: How the text (data) that the migrants are exposed to will help them to make meaning out of it and eventually lead to draw to conclusions about Christian hope.

Goal 2:

Method: Data is collected as to how the meaning is understood/mediated through printed, audio and storytelling formats

Evaluation: How the text (data) that they read will help them understand and make a conclusion with?

Goal 3:

Method: Data is collected on the various beliefs they have and make out of the text and learning

Evaluation: How the conclusions will help them to make beliefs of the world and take actions in relation to their challenges based on the same beliefs

CHAPTER 6

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

In consultation with the members of the Site Team, the following ministerial competencies were identified:

Ecumenism: The Bible Societies are inter-confessional organizations and have the mandate to serve and support the ministry of all churches. In this respect, working ecumenically has been an important aspect in my ministry involvement with the Bible Society. In the Gulf countries, the BSG works with multinational, multiethnic, and multilingual communities and denominations. For instance, the migrant community in the UAE consists of more than 150 different nationalities and ethnic groups. As the BSG General Secretary, I have had a 30-year-long experience of working amid such a diverse context. My experiences have equipped and trained me to deal with and to learn to respect the cultural and denominational traditions of each and every church and language group. This working relation has also increased my knowledge of the cultural and social habits of each and every tradition and confirmed my conviction about the importance of working in and for such diversified traditions. I came to know that each church is equally important and that the existence of each one of them is crucial for the ministry and mission of the bigger Christian perspective. On many occasions, the BSG has been a platform for churches of various denominations to come together for common functions. In this respect, the BSG has fostered dialogue and provided opportunities for different church communities to come together for services and spiritual seminars.

Ecumenism is the ministerial competency for Goal 3.

Witness or Evangelist: As a Bible Society leader, I have been trained over the years not only to distribute the Bible but also help the community to read and understand the Message. The latter has been a crucial characteristic of spreading the Good News not only within the church community but also beyond, such as in the labor camps, safe houses and prisons. The various Scripture engagement avenues that have been developed over the years - printed, AV and Story Telling - have been instrumental in witnessing to the communities in the Gulf. The BSG ministry to the migrants in particular has been one of those main “welcoming” acts where “others” (migrants who have always been alienated from the community) have been cared for, catered to and engaged with the message of hope and these in a Muslim country where witnessing is severely punished and constant surveillance by police a life-threatening reality. Such a restricted, intimidating context is a continuous challenge for me as the General Secretary of the whole operation but one that has taught me to trust the Lord, multiplied my faith and strengthened me in my witness.

Witness and evangelism is the ministerial competency for Goal 1.

Administrator: The BSG serves seven countries. As the General Secretary, I have been closely involved in defining not only the mission and business goals of each country but also the overall strategy for the entire Gulf region. Recruiting, organizing and chairing staff and Board meetings, maintaining smooth relations with countless Christian denominations, prioritizing, multi-tasking, initiating and implementing new strategies and software packages, fundraising, overseeing projects, managing the budget, writing regular reports to donors, delegating assignments, and supervising more than 20 outlets have been some of my administrative responsibilities in the BSG. Good time management and meticulous organization, I believe, have been at

the core of the smooth-running of the entire operation in the Gulf. I can only praise the Lord and thank Him for these gifts.

Administrator is the ministerial competency for Goal 2.

The Site Team members assessed these three qualifications in the candidate and ranked CONTINUE.

Religious Educator is the fourth ministerial competency that needs to be DEVELOPED in the days to come.

Strategy: I will engage in the study of relevant literature

Evaluation: Request evaluation from the Site Team members

APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A
TIMLELINE**

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible
12/2012	Submission of proposal	2 copies of proposal	Jebejian
1/2013	Draft introduction	Literature review	Jebejian
3/2013	Draft preliminary analysis	Literature review	Jebejian
4/2013	Plan of implementation	Group meetings and individual interviews	Jebejian / Ganta
5/2013	Evaluation process	Writing up	Jebejian
8/2013	Ministerial competencies	Writing up	Jebejian
9/2013	Bibliography	Writing up	Jebejian
10/2013	Rewrite introduction	Writing up	Jebejian
11/2013	Prepare table of contents and abstract	Writing up	Jebejian
12/2013	Get project bound and submit project	Copies of the project	Jebejian

**APPENDIX B
BUDGET**

Date	Task	Person responsible	Budget	Funding
4/2013	Meet group 1	Jebejian/Ganta	USD200	Bible Society
4/2013	Meet group 2	Jebejian/Ganta	USD200	Bible Society
4/2013	Meet group 3	Jebejian/Ganta	USD200	Bible Society
12/2013	Travel expenses	Jebejian	USD2000	Bible Society

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS USED DURING THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Characteristics of the churches in this survey

Denomination:

Year established:

Location:

Ethnic composition:

Questions on the churches participating in the survey

1. Can you briefly talk about the ministries your church runs?
2. Based on your experiences, what are some of the challenges and concerns the Telugu migrants coming to your church face? Can you provide examples?
3. What format of the Scriptures is used the most in your church – Bible, AV or Story Telling? Why do you think that is so?
4. Which format do you find the migrants are interested in the most? Why?
5. How do you help the migrants to understand and mediate on the Scripture message?
6. Which format do you think has the most impact on the migrants? Why? What are the reasons? Can you be specific?
7. Can you share with us some testimonies about how migrants were empowered by the message of hope and new life in Christ?
8. Can you share some stories about the way migrants were able to face their daily concerns and challenges after being exposed to the message of the Scriptures?
9. Probably previous migrant members of your congregation still keep in touch with you and tell you about some life-changing, spiritual experiences they

have had when they left the UAE to go back home or to other places. Can you share with me some stories or testimonies to this effect?

10. In what other ways do you think the BSG can help your church in your present and future programs designed especially for migrants?

Characteristics of the participants in this survey

Sex:

Age:

Nationality:

Education:

Occupation:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Family location:

Last seen family:

Denomination:

Language/s:

Years in UAE:

Questions on making meaning of the Scriptures

1. Do you read the Bible? If yes, how often?
2. How many times did you read the 4 texts from the Bible that talk about hope?
3. Do you prefer to read the Bible in your mother language or it doesn't matter? Why?
4. Do you find it easy to understand a text in Telugu? If not, what do you do to grasp the meaning of the text?

5. How do you understand the main concepts of the 4 texts: that Jesus seeks, saves, and leads us (has authority on our lives)?
6. Could you relate the text to your culture and values?
7. Did you find the meaning of the text applicable to real life situations?
8. You heard the 4 texts in Telugu in AV format. How did you make meaning of it? Did you discuss it with your church leaders, share it with a friend or think about it on your own?
9. How does storytelling function in your home culture? Do you tell stories? When, How, Why. Does your own experience with storytelling help you understand Jesus as a story teller?

Questions on mediating the Scriptures

1. Can you think of a time when someone told you a story and it made a difference in your life?
2. Did you find yourself in the 4 texts that you read? Could you see that Jesus has found you? Saved you? Has authority on your life and that he leads you? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?
3. How often do you listen or watch an AV rendition of the Bible? Do you think it makes an impact on the way you look at life? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?
4. Did you find yourself in the 4 texts that you heard through AV? Did it make any impact on the way you look at life? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?
5. Do you think your knowledge of the Scriptures through Story Telling helped you to mediate on the Scripture message of hope? If yes, can you share with me some examples where the story you heard made you think of the particular situation you were in or helped you face a particular need or a problem?

6. When you heard the 4 texts through Story Telling, did it help you engage with the Message of hope? If yes, can you share with me some examples where the story you heard made you think of a particular situation where it helped you face a particular need or a problem?

Questions on nurturing the Scriptures

Now that you have read the texts, made meaning and tried to locate yourself into it, how do you define and understand Christian/Biblical hope in your life?

1. How does the message of hope offered by the Scriptures help you? In what circumstances? Can you explain?
2. In what ways does the message of hope help you a problem? Can you think of a time when the Scriptures made a difference in your life?
3. Do you think the message of hope and a new life with Christ will nurture you when you go back to your home country or any other country where you might find work? How?

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APPENDIX B
CHRISTIAN CHURCHGOERS IN THE UAE⁴⁶⁹

Continent/Country	Percent
India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka	69.8
Africa	7.5
Europe	3.2
North America	1.3
Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Brunei, East Timor, and Singapore	1.3
China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan	1.2
South America	0.7
Australia	0.6

⁴⁶⁹ Catherine Graham, “The Gulf Church, Migrant Workers and Muslim Society,” extensive survey independently printed in 2009, 8.

APPENDIX C
BSG RESOURCE CENTERS

Year	Country	City	Church Compound
2003	UAE	Jabal Ali, Dubai	Evangelical Church
2005	UAE	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi	Evangelical Church
2006	UAE	Abu Dhabi	Catholic Church
2008	UAE	Sharjah	St. Martin's Anglican
2010	UAE	Sharjah	Union Church
2010	UAE	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi	Evangelical Church
2012	UAE	Abu Dhabi	Evangelical Church Center
1987 renovated in 2003	Bahrain	Manama	National Evangelical Church
2007	Bahrain	Manama	Philadelphia Church
	Bahrain	Manama	St. Christopher's Anglican
2012	Bahrain	Manama	Rivers of Joy
2010	Qatar	Doha	Catholic Church
2011	Qatar	Doha	Anglican Church
1998	Kuwait	Kuwait City	Catholic Church
1999	Kuwait	Kuwait City	National Evangelical Church
2005	Kuwait	Salmiyah	Catholic Church
2010	Kuwait	Ahmadi	St. Paul's Anglican
1988 renovated in 1998	Oman	Ruwi	Protestant Church
1998	Oman	Sohar	Protestant Church
2005	Oman	Ghala	Protestant Church
2010	Oman	Salalah	Christian Church
2003	Yemen	Aden	Christ Church

APPENDIX D
MIGRANT POPULATION AND COMPOSITION⁴⁷⁰

Country	Total Population	Migrant Population	Male Migrant Population	Female Migrant Population	Migrant % of Total Population
Oman	2,773,479	826,074	654,541	171,533	30%
Kuwait	3,054,744	2,097,527	1,467,975	629,552	69%
UAE	8,264,070	3,293,264	2,389,487	903,777	40%
Bahrain	1,234,571	315,403	211,561	103,842	26%
Qatar	1,853,563	1,305,428	968,712	336,716	70%
Saudi Arabia	23,136,977	7,288,900	5,093,349	2,195,551	32%

⁴⁷⁰ CIA World Factbook, 2013.

APPENDIX E
LIST OF LANGUAGES OF PRINTED AND AV RESOURCES

Bible	New Testament	Audio	Literature
Afrikaans		Afrikaans	Afrikaans
Amharic		Amharic	Amharic
Arabic- French	Arabic-French		
Arabic	Arabic	Arabic	Arabic
Arabic-English Diglot	Arabic-English Diglot		
Armenian Eastern	Armenian Eastern		
Armenian Western	Armenian Western	Armenian Western	Armenian Western
Bangla	Bangla	Bangla	
Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali
Bulgarian		Bulgarian	Bulgarian
Cebuano			
Chinese-English Diglot	Chinese-English Diglot		
Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Croatian			Croatian
Czech		Czech	Czech
Danish			
Dari	Dari	Dari	
Dutch	Dutch	Dutch	Dutch
English	English	English	English
Estonian			
Farsi	Farsi	Farsi	Farsi
	Farsi-English Diglot		
Finnish			Finnish
French	French	French	French
German	German	German	German
	Greek	Greek	Greek
	Greek-English Diglot		
Gujarati	Gujarati	Gujarati	Gujarati
Hebrew			
Hebrew-English Diglot			
Hindi	Hindi	Hindi	Hindi
Hindi-English Diglot			
Hungarian			Hungarian
Ilocano			
Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian
Italian		Italian	Italian
Japanese			
Kannada	Kannada	Kannada	Kannada

Konkani G	Konkani G	Konkani G	
Konkani M	Konkani G	Konkani M	
Korean	Korean	Korean	Korean
Latin			
		Kurdish Sorani	
Lithuanian			
Malayal-English Diglot			
Malayalam	Malayalam	Malayalam	Malayalam
Manipuri			
Marathi	Marathi	Marathi	
Mbai			
Myanmar (Burmese)		Myanmar	Myanmar
Nepali	Nepali	Nepali	Nepali
	Nepali-English Diglot		
Norwegian			Norwegian
Oriya		Oriya	
	Pashtun	Pashtun	
Polish		Polish	Polish
Portuguese		Portuguese	Portuguese
Punjabi	Punjabi	Punjabi	Punjabi
Romanian		Romanian	Romanian
Russian		Russian	Russian
Seereer			
Serbian			Serbian
	Sindhi		
Sinhala	Sinhala	Sinhala	
Slovak			
Slovenian		Slovenian	Slovenian
Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
Spanish-English Diglot			
		Somali	
Swahili		Swahili	Swahili
Swedish		Swedish	Swedish
Syriac		Syriac	
Tagalog	Tagalog	Tagalog	Tagalog
Tagalog-English Diglot	Tagalog-English Diglot		
Tamil	Tamil	Tamil	Tamil
Tamil-English Diglot			
Telugu	Telugu	Telugu	Telugu
Telugu-English Diglot			
Thai	Thai	Thai	Thai
Tigrinia		Tigrinia	

Turkish	Turkish	Turkish	Turkish
Ukrainian		Ukrainian	Ukrainian
Urdu	Urdu	Urdu	Urdu
Vietnamese		Vietnamese	Vietnamese
		Yoruba	
			Zulu

APPENDIX F
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TELUGU INTERVIEWEES IN THE STUDY

Printed

	Int 1	Int 2	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6
Sex	F	M	M	F	F	M
Age	33	43	32	38	40	36
Education	5 th grade	10 th grade	7 th grade	5 th grade	10 th grade	5 th grade
Occupation	Maid	Messenger	Construction worker	Airport guests receiver	School bus conductor	Hotel porter
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Number of children	None	2	2	3	2	2
Family in UAE	No	Wife	No	No	No	No
Last seen family	2 years ago	2 years ago	3 years ago	1 year ago	2 years ago	2 years ago
Church	Jahore Jamire Telugu	Jahore Jamire Telugu	Jahore Jamire Telugu	Jahore Jamire Telugu	Jahore Jamire Telugu	Jahore Jamire Telugu
Languages	Telugu, Arabic and English (very weak)	Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi	Telugu, Hindi	Telugu, Arabic and English (very weak)	Telugu, Hindi and Arabic (very weak)	Telugu, Hindi and English (very weak)
Years in UAE	2	27	10	9	2	2

Audio

	Int 1	Int 2.	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6
Sex	M	F	F	F	M	M
Age	50	50	55	43	32	37
Education	Non	Non	6th grade	10 th grade	8 th grade	4 th grade
Occupation	Building roads	Maid	Maid	Maid	Construction worker	Construction worker
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Number of children	4	3	3	2	Non	2
Family in UAE	No	No	No	No	No	No
Last seen family	2 years ago	2 years ago	1 year ago	1 year ago	2 years ago	2 years ago
Church	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.
Languages	Telugu, Hindi	Telugu, Hindi	Telugu, Hindi	Telugu, Arabic	Telugu, Hindi	Telugu
Years in UAE	5	10	15	1	6	10

Storytelling

	Int 1	Int 2	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6
Sex	F	F	F	M	M	M
Age	50	51	53	32	25	42
Education	10 th grade	5 th grade	9 th grade	9 th grade	10 th grade	8 th grade
Occupation	Housewife	School bus conductor	School janitor	Technician	Cleaner	plumber
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Single	Married
Number of children	3	Non	3	1	Non	2
Family in UAE	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Last seen family	Family in the UAE	Family in the UAE	Family in the UAE	1 year ago	3 years ago	1 year ago
Church	Satwa Suvarta Sanghan	Christian Evang.	Satwa Suvarta Sanghan	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.	Telugu Evang.
Languages	Telugu, English and Hindi (very weak)	Telugu, Hindi, Arabic and English (very weak)	Telugu, Hindi and English (very weak)	Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, English (very weak)	Telugu, Tamil and Hindi (weak)	Telugu, Hindi and English (weak)
Years in UAE	15	9	22	9	5	8

APPENDIX G
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCHES WHOSE PASTORS WERE
INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

Church	Year established	Pastor's nationality	Ethnic composition	Language of worship
Egyptian Coptic	2009	Egyptian	Egyptian	Arabic and Coptic
Ethiopian Evangelical	1994	Ethiopian	Ethiopian	Amharic and Tigrinya
Pakistan Pentecostal Evangelical	1995	Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu
St. Mary's Catholic Filipino congregation	1965	Filipino	Filipinos	Tagalong
St. Martin's Anglican		Tamil	Pakistani, Indian, Sri Lankan, African	English
Telugu Evangelical	1989	Telugu	Telugu	Telugu

APPENDIX H
A SAMPLE OF SURPLUS MEANINGS GLEANED FROM THE
COLLECTED DATA

Interviewee	Faith	Action-based	Discipleship	Training
33FP1	“God will do more miracles in my life”			
43MP2	“God is God of impossibilities”	“Encouraged to share my faith with others in the labor camp”		“It is my duty to share”
32MP3		“I am committed to reach out to others”		
40FP5	“I saw in the three stories great faith”	“God’s Word empowers to reach out to others”		
32MP3		“Ecc. 11:9 opened the eye and the heart of my friend and he accepted Jesus”		
50MA7		“Not shy about my faith and sharing it with others”		“I want to know more about Jesus and grow in faith”
50FA8	“God who did miracles to the three women can also do to me”	“God takes care of me and my family in India”		“Without the Gospel migrants will go to bad habits... I want to become an evangelist”
43FA10			“I want to aim and grow in the kind of faith and hope that the three women had”	“I want to continue to grow in the Lord”
25MS17		“I want to share because		“Jesus gives me strength to be a

		God's Word gives great comfort"		good witness"
32MA11		"Desire for all people who were blind like me to come to faith"	"My friend and I are attending Bible study group and are working on solving our problems with the help of Jesus"	
42MST18			"We have to keep connected to Him"	"When I listen to migrants' problems, that gives me the opportunity to share with them stories of hope from the Bible"
53FST15		"The church and I can reach to migrants and bring them to the true faith in Jesus"	"We need to be persistent in our faith"	"We need to keep an eye on each other and always talk to them about God and His love"
50FST13		"I want to put Bible stories in megavoice devices and share with others who have no faith"		
51FST14			"Learned to stay focused and not be distracted"	
32MST16	"God can solve and cure my problems no matter how difficult they are"	"Storytelling sessions have given me great motivation to share the faith with others"		
55FA9		"I want others to enjoy God's peace"	"I want to be stronger like the women in the texts and have more hope and	

			faith”	
37MA12		“I want to see their lives changed in Dubai and will do the same when I go back home to India”	“Like the three women, their prayers were answered, I feel this gratitude too”	
38FP4		“determined to share this healing message wherever I am”		
36MP6		“Matthew 24:40 challenges me to share my faith wherever I am”		

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